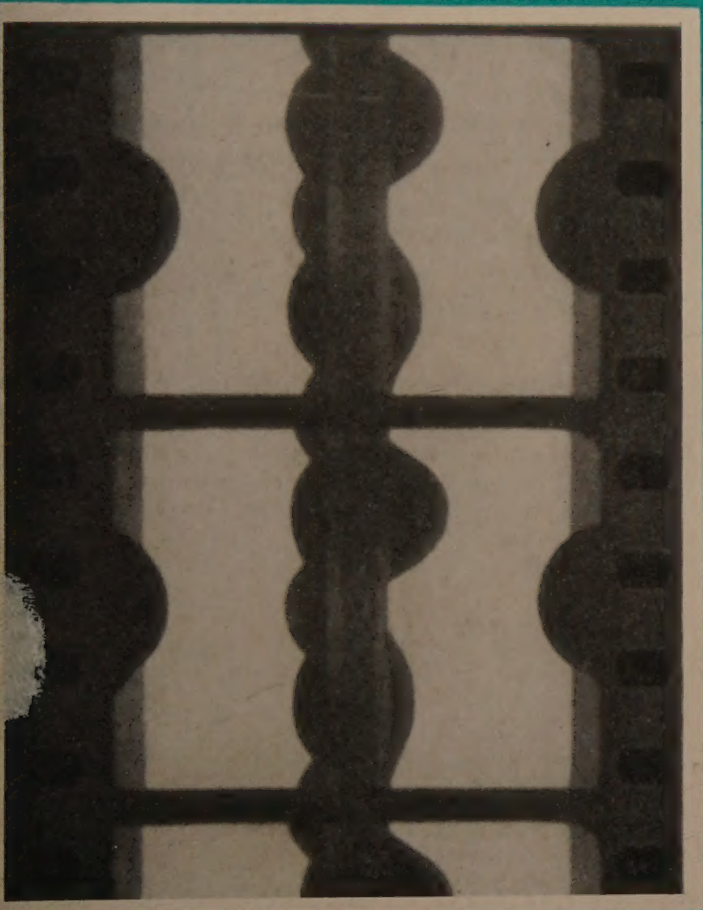


MAGAZINE OF ART

FEBRUARY 1952 75 CENTS THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS



HANS RICHTER: **EASEL—SCROLL—FILM**

FORBES WATSON: **JOHN SLOAN**

LEWIS MUMFORD: **STANDARDIZATION, REPRODUCTION AND CHOICE**

MILDRED FISCHER: **THREE FINNISH WEAVERS**

NAUM GABO: **A NEW CONSTRUCTION FOR BALTIMORE**

A. HYATT MAYOR: **WRITING AND PAINTING IN CHINA**

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LIBRARY

PARTIAL CRITICISM

"... nothing is easier than to string out words about one thing or another and to do over . . . what has already been duly imagined, weighed and, above all, executed and brought to a conclusion."

—DELACROIX

IT is sometimes maintained that in the broad view of history, criticism arises only when the arts decline. Yet for nearly two hundred years—ever since Diderot praised Greuze to the skies—there has been an uncommon amount of critical writing about the arts. The results do not suggest that these effusions have in any way interfered with creation, and today such discussions, distributed by our mass media to a wider audience than ever before, seem a permanent part of our perhaps too verbal culture.

I would suggest rather that the present difficulty is that we suffer not from an overabundance of criticism, but from its dearth. For the plain fact is that critical writing about art has not kept pace with the expansion of creative activity and interest in this country. There just are not enough reviews, not enough letters to the editor—not even enough editorials about the arts. The economic reasons put forth by publishers of newspapers and magazines for not allowing more writing on the arts and devoting more space to it are well known, even if they remain unconvincing. The ultimate result, however, is more serious than a simple want remaining unsatisfied, for it produces a distressing uniformity in the writing that does get done.

The situation here parallels that of our exhibitions: as we have cross-section shows, so we have cross-section criticism; regional exhibitions are matched by regional reporting; balanced juries find their counterparts in balanced space distributed in indifferent fairness to all tendencies and all qualities alike. In a period during which there is a greater variety of stylistic trends and a greater latitude for individual expression within these trends than has ever before existed, editors have no qualms about asking one man—one eye, one taste—to judge them all. Like the man in the whiskey advertisement, he is supposed to know quality when he sees it, regardless of whether he has any feeling for a particular direction in art, any understanding of its motives or sympathy for its goals. (Beer, rum and pineapple juice, as well as whiskey, even if he's never tasted them.)

It may be protested that the activity here summarized describes not criticism, but reporting. That is just the trouble; in actual practice no distinction is made between the two. The newspaper critic and his magazine colleague, through no wish of their own but to answer a supposed journalistic requirement, are asked to suppress their personal leanings and to write with equal

conviction and enthusiasm about all entries in the current art scene and—as if they were the judges at a Golden Gloves Tournament or the annual of the Kennel Club—award ribbons to the "best in its class" and finally to the "best in the show." The assumption here is plain: the critic is external to all the breeds of art; his judgments are objective ones, and as an impartial judge he can serve equally well as a guide to all artistic avenues.

As with the staging of exhibitions, the remedy lies in the direction of acknowledged diversity and responsibility. The critics we remember are not those who are the most impartial. Diderot, Baudelaire, Zola, Ruskin, Fénéon, Fry, McBride, all express definite and often violent preferences and aversions; all write from a point of view and support an artistic direction in which they believe. Even those whom history has proved wrong—the Maclaurs and the Cortissoz of any time—are remembered today, while their indifferent, eclectic colleagues have been forgotten.

Such responsible criticism implies neither blind bias nor narrow exclusion. It should rather be thought of as positive, and suggest support and sympathetic interpretation for those artists with whom the critic feels an intuitive understanding. He is not called upon to use the unquestioning superlatives of the press-agent, and he will at times express a disappointment that is the measure of his faith. Precisely because such a critic writes from an acknowledged point of view, he writes with greater conviction and freedom. Taste is not invariable, nor is it superficially consistent, and the same person may respond, for very different reasons, to very different artists; therefore the critic need not stick to any one label, be it expressionism or classicism, abstraction or representation. Artists and movements sometimes fail of their original promise, and the critic remains uncommitted to personalities. But it would be healthier all around if it were generally agreed that for critics, as for the public, some avenues of art are more accessible than others, some directions more attractive. Then the critic—no longer a reporter—would have to explain and justify his preferences, first to himself and then to his audience. And thus his readers, reflecting upon the assumptions of the critic's taste, would come to clarify their own.

If any such scheme of open acknowledgment is to work, and help to free creation and acceptance, there must be a greater volume of criticism than there is today. But if the first steps could be taken to break down the disguise of reportorial eclectic objectivity, and open partisanship be established, spokesmen for the many camps would of necessity quickly arise. And thus we should be headed towards the true solution that our diversified art calls forth: the combining of an over-all pluralism with individual conviction.

R. G.

STANDARDIZATION, REPRODUCTION AND CHOICE

Lewis Mumford



Fourteen Auxiliary Saints,
Swabian, c. 1470 (?), woodcut,
Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection,
National Gallery of Art. A sheet
probably produced for pilgrims
and intended to be cut up, mak-
ing small cards which could be
used in missals or prayerbooks.

AMONG the many paradoxes in the relation of arts and technics is that from an early time, the process of duplication in quantity has been applied to works of art. Casting, molding and stamping are all very old technical devices making possible the reproduction of innumerable exact copies of an original work. The first step in modern mass production took place when the stamping process was applied to the mechanical reproduction of images by means of woodblock printing. This early effort to increase and cheapen the means of reproducing pictures was followed in turn by copper and steel engraving, various forms of etching, lithography and color lithography.

With the invention of these graphic processes, pictures could go into circulation like any other commodity and could be sold so cheaply that all but the poorest classes could afford to own them. From the fifteenth century on, the picture gained in intimacy, variety and wide distribution what it lost in uniqueness. This democratization of the image was one of the earliest triumphs of the machine; and viewed in its beginnings the whole process, like that of democracy itself, seemed an entirely happy one. That there might be something in the machine process itself that could, if not guarded against, make this excellent development go awry was a possibility hardly



Marcantonio Raimondi, *St. Cecilia*, early 16th century, wood engraving after a design by Raphael

anyone suspected before the nineteenth century.

What has been the result of the mass production of esthetic symbols and the democratization of art that has gone along with it? What benefits have we derived from it, and what dangers do we now confront?

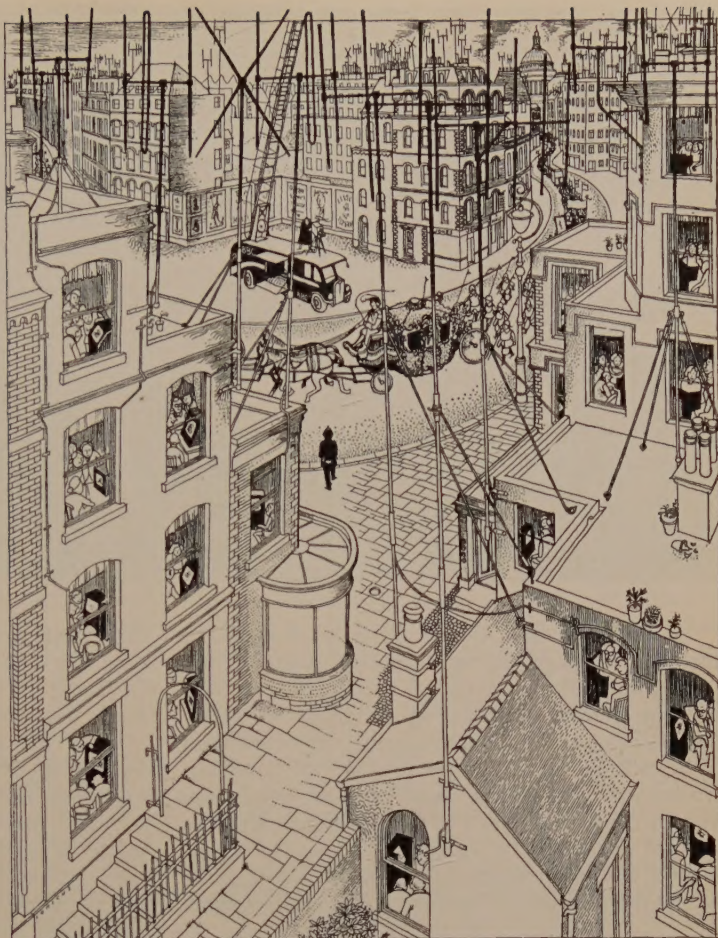
We are all conscious of the benefits. By means of our various devices for reproducing images, a large part of our experience that once vanished without any sort of record has been arrested and fixed, and many important experiences, difficult to transpose into words, are now made permanently visible. Certain aspects of art which were once reserved for the privileged are now an everyday experience to those who make use of the resources of printing and photography. The gains are so demonstrable that we have unfortunately become a little unwary as to deficits and losses, so that I propose now to point out how our very success with these processes of reproducing works of art has presented us with a series of problems whose dimensions have been increasing at an almost geometric ratio, year by year.

The fact is that in every department of art and thought we are being overwhelmed by our symbol-creating capacity. Our very facility with

the mechanical means of multifold and reproduction has been responsible for a progressive failure in selectivity and therefore in the power of assimilation. Between ourselves and the actual experience, the actual environment, there is an ever-rising flood of images that come to us in every sort of medium: by camera and by printing press, by motion picture and by television. A picture was once a rare sort of symbol—rare enough to call for attentive concentration. Now it is the actual experience that is rare, and the picture has become ubiquitous. For every one who takes part in the game in the ball-park, a thousand people see the game by television, and see the static photograph of some incident the next day in the newspaper, and the moving picture of it the next week in the newsreel. So with every event. We are rapidly dividing the world into two classes: a minority who act increasingly in the consciousness that their actions will be viewed by means of these processes, and a majority whose entire life is spent serving as the passive appreciators or willing victims of the reproduced happenings. Deliberately on every historic occasion we fake real events for the benefit of the photographers, while the event itself occurs in a different fashion; and we have the effrontery to pass these fakes off as authentic historical documents. An endless succession of images passes before our eyes, offered by people who wish to exercise power either by making us buy something or by making us agree to something that would benefit their economic or political interests: images of goods offered by manufacturers, images of seductive young ladies who are supposed by association to make us seek other equally desirable objects; images of people and events in the news; images so constant, so unremitting, that for all purposes of our own we might as well be paralyzed, so superfluous are our own inner promptings or self-directed actions. As a result of this whole mechanical process, we cease to live in the multi-dimensional world of reality, the world that brings into play every aspect of the human personality. We have substituted, largely through the mass production of graphic symbols, a secondhand world in which everyone lives a secondhand and derivative life.

The general effect of this multiplication of graphic symbols has been to lessen the impact of art itself—a result that might have disheartened the early inventors of the new processes of pictorial reproduction had they been able to foresee it. In order to survive in this image-glutted world, it is necessary for us to devalue the symbol and reject every aspect of it but the purely sensational one. For the very repetition of the stimulus would make it necessary for us to empty it of meaning even if the act of repetition did not automatically produce this result. Then, by a reciprocal process, the emptier a symbol is of meaning, the more must its user depend upon mere repetition and sensationalism to achieve his purpose. This is a vicious circle if ever there was one. Because of the sheer

From *Punch*, November 7th, 1951
(reproduced by permission
of the Proprietors of *Punch*)



Spectators at a Print Shop
in St. Paul's Churchyard,
English, 18th century,
steel engraving



multiplication of esthetic images, people must, in order to retain any degree of autonomy and self-direction, achieve a certain opacity, an insensitiveness, a protective thickening of the hide lest they be overwhelmed and confused by the multitude of demands made upon their attention. We only half-see, half-feel, half-understand what is going on, for we should be neurotic wrecks if we tried to give anything like our full attention to all the extraneous visual stimuli that impinge upon us. But although this habit perhaps protects us from an early nervous breakdown, it also protects us from works of art, which demand our fullest attention, our willing participation, our own individual and re-creative response. What we settle for, since we must close our minds, are the bare sensations, and that is perhaps one of the reasons that the modern artist, defensively, has less and less to say. In order to make *sensations* seem more important than *meanings*, he is compelled to use processes of magnification and distortion, similar to the stunts used by the big advertiser to attract attention. So the doctrine of mass production, "faster and faster," leads to the sensationalism of "louder and louder"; and that in turn, as it affects the meaning of the symbols used by the artist, means "emptier and emptier."



Sir Luke Fildes,
The Country Doctor, c. 1880,
courtesy The Bettmann Archive

Behold, then, the result of our magnificent technical triumph in reproducing works of art: we diminish the contents of the image; we narrow the human response; we progressively eliminate the powers of human choice; we overwhelm by repetition; and, in order to stave off boredom, we intensify the purely sensational aspects of the image. The final effect is the devaluation of the symbol itself, partly because it comes to us attached to some other object which we may or may not want, partly because it has multiplied to

the point where we are overwhelmed by sheer quantity and are no longer able to assimilate anything but a small part of the meaning it might otherwise convey.

This perversion of the whole process of making reproductions is due to our gratuitous assumption that the mere existence of a mechanism for mass production carries with it an obligation to use it to the fullest capacity. But there is, in fact, no rational basis for this assumption. The process itself can be challenged, the product con-

Vincent Van Gogh, Sunflowers, 1888, oil, 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Vincent W. Van Gogh, Amsterdam, courtesy Museum of Modern Art



Pablo Picasso, Woman in White, 1923,
oil, 39 x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", Museum of Modern Art



trolled, provided that we do not give over to the machine the attributes of the person. Just because a machine can be on duty twenty-four hours is no reason for keeping it operating on that schedule. The great principle here is that as soon as mechanical limitations are sloughed off, human limitations must be clamped on.

Let us carry this general argument about the devaluation of the image back into the realm of art. One of the real technical achievements of the last half century has been to devise means of producing color reproductions of paintings with increasingly high fidelity. For a small fraction of the price of an original—itsself sometimes priceless and beyond the reach of even the wealthiest bidder—the ordinary citizen may have as his private possession a picture that as an original was entirely beyond his reach, physically as well as financially. On the surface this would seem an unalloyed triumph for the mechanical process, as well as a genuine triumph for popular education. The otherwise demagogic promise of making every man a king would here seem capable of fulfilment, even as it in some degree reduces the king—the proud possessor of a unique object—to the level of the man in the street. As with the entire democratic process of equalization (which De Tocqueville described as the essential theme of the last seven centuries), it brings about a true leveling off in both directions, upwards and downwards, and provides fair esthetic shares for all.

But thanks to the very non-selectivity of the process, the actual result is not quite such a happy one. Already there exists a whole group of pictures so frequently reproduced, so often hung, so insistently visible, that they have forfeited all the magic of the original. We all have seen these pictures, alas! once too often. When I was a boy, such a picture was Sir Luke Fildes' *The Country Doctor*, showing a bewhiskered physician visiting a sick child—a bathetic piece of popular art whose devaluation would now bring tears to no one's eyes. But because of the very raising of the level of popular taste, the same thing is now happening with paintings of the highest excellence. There are works by Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso that are descending the swift, slippery slope to oblivion by reason of the fact that they are on view at all times and everywhere. And although with every great work of art, the more one returns to it the more one sees in it, nevertheless when a certain point of saturation has been reached the result is the rapid effacement of the image: it sinks into the background—indeed, it disappears.

This is quite apart from the disquieting coarseness of discrimination whereby bad pictures are reproduced as good art, or good pictures are so vilely reproduced as to constitute an esthetic betrayal of artist and student. The vice I am now speaking about is quite different from these perversions. Even when our reproductions are adequate, even when they are nearly perfect, we must still confront one very significant fact that our

whole civilization seems to have long lost sight of in its preoccupation with mechanical competence. As my elders used to put it (somewhat smugly for my taste, it seemed when I was young), "It is possible to have too much of a good thing." Indeed the more intense, the more valuable an experience is, the more rare it must be and the more brief its duration. Regularity and repetition, those gifts of the machine, must be confined to those parts of life that correspond to the reflex system in the body. They are not processes that have anything to contribute, except in a strictly subordinate way, to the higher functions—to the emotions and imagination, to feeling and rational insight. The danger of an over-regulated, over-routinized life given to excessive repetition was discovered long ago in the monastery. Any object that is too constantly present, however interesting or desirable it may be in itself, presently loses its special significance; what we look at habitually, we overlook.

This general truth has a direct application to reproduction and domestication in art. Novelty, adventure, variety, spontaneity, intensity—these are all very essential ingredients in a work of art; and a great work of art, like El Greco's *View of Toledo* at the Metropolitan Museum, is one that presents this feeling of shock and delight, of new things to be revealed, at every encounter with it. Such works are inexhaustible in their meaning—but with one proviso: one must not go to them too often. The rarity of the experience is an essential preparation for the delight. Without rhythm and interval there is only satiety and ennui.

But all this is in opposition to the tendency of mass production, which by its very nature imposes on the community a terrible new burden—the duty to consume. In the arts, at the very moment at which the extension of the processes of reproduction promised to widen the area of freedom, this new necessity has served to undermine the habits of choice, discrimination and selectivity—habits that are essential to both creation and enjoyment. Quantity has counted for more than quality.

Like the sorcerer's apprentice who mastered the formula for putting objects to work for him with unflagging energy but came to grief because he never had learned the secret of bringing these automatic activities to an end, we not merely permit people to share the new-found powers that the machine has opened up but insist that they do so, with increasingly less respect for their needs, tastes and preferences, simply because we have found no spell for turning the machine off. This applies to all our activities, from motor cars to atom bombs, from photographs to reproductions of works of art. It is as if we had invented an automobile with neither a brake nor a steering wheel, but only an accelerator, as if our only form of control consisted in making the machine go faster. As our mass-production system is now set up, a slowing down of consumption in



El Greco, *View of Toledo*, 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", Metropolitan Museum of Art

any department produces a crisis if not a catastrophe. That is why only under the pressure of war or of preparation for war, in which waste and destruction come to its aid, does the machine now operate effectively on its own terms.

The tendencies described are widespread; but in no realm have they been more fatal than in that of art. As long as a work of art was an individual product, there was a strict limit to the number that an individual could produce in his lifetime. Under such a system, there was no problem of quantity—or rather, the problem was that of too little, not too much. Natural and organic limitations took the place of rational selectivity; only those who held some special political or economic monopoly were ever even temporarily in a position of being threatened by a surfeit. So appetites remained keen, because only rarely could they be sated. Under such conditions there was no reason to exercise a vigilant control over quantity or to foster a discipline of restraint and a habit of studious selection. Such discrimination as was necessary was that operating on a basis of quality alone.

What has happened during the last century has brought about just the opposite kind of condition. As a result of our mechanical processes of graphic reproduction, we are now creating a special race of people, whom one may call art-consumers. From earliest youth they are trained to conduct the normal activities of living within the sound of the radio and the sight of the television screen, and they are taken—in all big cities at least—in troops and legions through art galleries and museums, so that they may be conditioned with equal passivity to the sight of pictures.

The intimate experiences, the first-hand activities, upon which all the arts must be based are thrust out of consciousness. The victims of this system are never given enough time alone to be aware of their own impulses or inner promptings, to indulge in even so much as a day-dream without the aid of a radio program or a motion picture.

Those who have pushed the processes of pictorial reproduction to their limit forget the essential nature of art: its uniqueness. Our technical facilities will be of human value only when we learn to curb the flood of images that now overwhelm us and learn to control the occasion, the quantity, the duration, the frequency of repetition, in accordance with our needs and our capacity for assimilation. Expressive art, just in proportion to its value and significance, must be precious, difficult, occasional—in a word, aristocratic. It is better to look at a real work of art once a year—or even once in a lifetime—and really see it, really feel it, really assimilate it, than to have a reproduction of it hanging before one continually.

To summarize: the quantitative reproduction of art, through the advance of technics, from the woodblock print to the wire-recorder, has increased the need for qualitative understanding and qualitative choice. At the same time it has imposed on us, in opposition to the duty to participate in mass consumption, the duty to control quantity by erecting a rational criterion, now that we are no longer disciplined by natural scarcity. The very expansion of the machine during the last few centuries has taught mankind a lesson that was otherwise, perhaps, too obvious to be learned: the value of the singular, the unique, the precious, the deeply personal. There are certain occasions in life where the aristocratic principle must balance the democratic one; where the personalism of art, fully entered into, must counteract the impersonalism, and therefore the superficiality, of technics. We do no one any service if we limitlessly water the wine in order to have enough to give everybody in the community a drop, under the illusion that he is draining a whole glass. Unless we can turn the water itself into wine, so that everyone may partake of the real thing, there is in fact no miracle, and nothing worth celebrating in the marriage of art and technics. But if we erect this personal discipline and selectivity, nothing that the machine offers us need embarrass us.

This conclusion should go some way to repairing the breach that has so long existed between art and morals, between goodness and truth. The fact is that to enjoy the perfections and delights of art, above all in a day of mass production, the whole organism must be keyed up to its highest level of vigor, sensitive and responsive as only healthy beings are sensitive and responsive. The achievement of this state requires not only hygiene and gymnastics, as the incomparable Athenians knew, but a high state of moral alertness and conscious control, a readiness to reject many inferior

goods in favor of the supreme good offered by a genuine work of art, which is like the good of a friendship when offered by a person who gives you his best without reserve. We need to develop habits of inhibition on which we have too easily bestowed, in the recent past, the epithet "puritanic." Although I am a fervent admirer of William Blake, for all that I would reverse one of his aphorisms, "Damn Braces, Bless Relaxes" and say that there is no chance of coping with the evils

of mass production unless we are ready to bless braces and to exercise, whenever needed, the most strenuous control of mere quantity. To have the right amount of the right quality in the right time and the right place for the right purpose is the essence of morality; and, as it turns out, it is perhaps the most important condition for the enjoyment of art. Here, if anywhere, Zarathustra's words, as uttered by Nietzsche, apply: "Choosing is creating! Hear that, ye creating ones!"



The Louvre, Paris

MONA LISA's elusive smile has attracted millions of people ever since her portrait was painted by famous Leonardo da Vinci more than 400 years ago.

Full-page newspaper advertisement, Rheingold Extra Dry Beer, 1951, courtesy Foote, Cone and Belding

IMITATED... BUT NEVER DUPLICATED

Rheingold Extra Dry

New York City's Original Extra Dry beer



*The largest-selling
beer in town*

THREE FINNISH WEAVERS

Mildred Fischer



Eva Anttila, *Moonlight*, tapestry, photograph Kolmio

IT is generally conceded by connoisseurs in the Scandinavian countries that Finland's weavers are the most creative in northern Europe. One reason for this may lie in the relative scarcity of materials, forcing weavers to exercise ingenuity in exploiting the possibilities of what is available. Shortage of wool and linen during the past few years has led textile designers to create interesting functional fabrics from fine and coarse paper yarns, straw, birch-bark strips and other varieties of wood products. A fine feeling for materials has, however, always been inherent with Finnish artists. Being naturally texture-conscious, they know intuitively which yarns will mix well and are always seeking more interesting ways to combine and contrast them.

Another reason for the distinction of Finnish weaving comes from the fact that the artists live close to nature, with enough space and enough time for the quiet penetration of each separate entity into their individual consciousness.

Thus the forms in the woven designs suggest the earth motives—the rocks, trees and bark, water and clouds—with which the Finns associate intimately. The charm of their craft lies in a virile, primitive quality of design coupled with sound workmanship and an unusual conception of the art possibilities in textiles. These characteristics are evident in the work of three of Finland's leading weaving artists: Eva Anttila, Martta Taipale and Laila Karttunen. All three are in their fifties, all three have international reputations, and the work of each is highly individual. And each one believes that her ultimate development as an artist is yet to come.

Eva Anttila of Helsinki is a specialist in tapestry weaving. While most tapestry designers employ skilled artisans for the actual weaving, Mrs. Anttila weaves her own compositions with an impeccable technique. Her designs are first rendered in crayon or watercolor, but in the weaving she does not try to reproduce a "painterly" quality.

Rather, she seeks to express in a woven fabric what cannot be expressed in any other way, thus retaining the peculiarly "clothly" quality belonging to textiles. Most of Eva Anttila's tapestries are woven on an inclined loom with a linen or cotton warp. She likes to interpret romantic subjects, such as *The Street* and *Moonlight*, as well as Biblical themes and Scandinavian folk tales. Her style is characterized by an unusual linear treatment and rather muted colors with occasional rhythmic flashes of brilliancy. She is keenly interested in contemporary abstract art, especially in the paintings of Klee, Braque, Paul Nash and Francis Hodgkins. Experimenting with new graphic media often inspires new ideas for her weaving. "I believe that art grows out of all our own experiences," she states. "Naturally we are influenced by others and can learn from them; but one cannot imitate and at the same time be a creative artist."

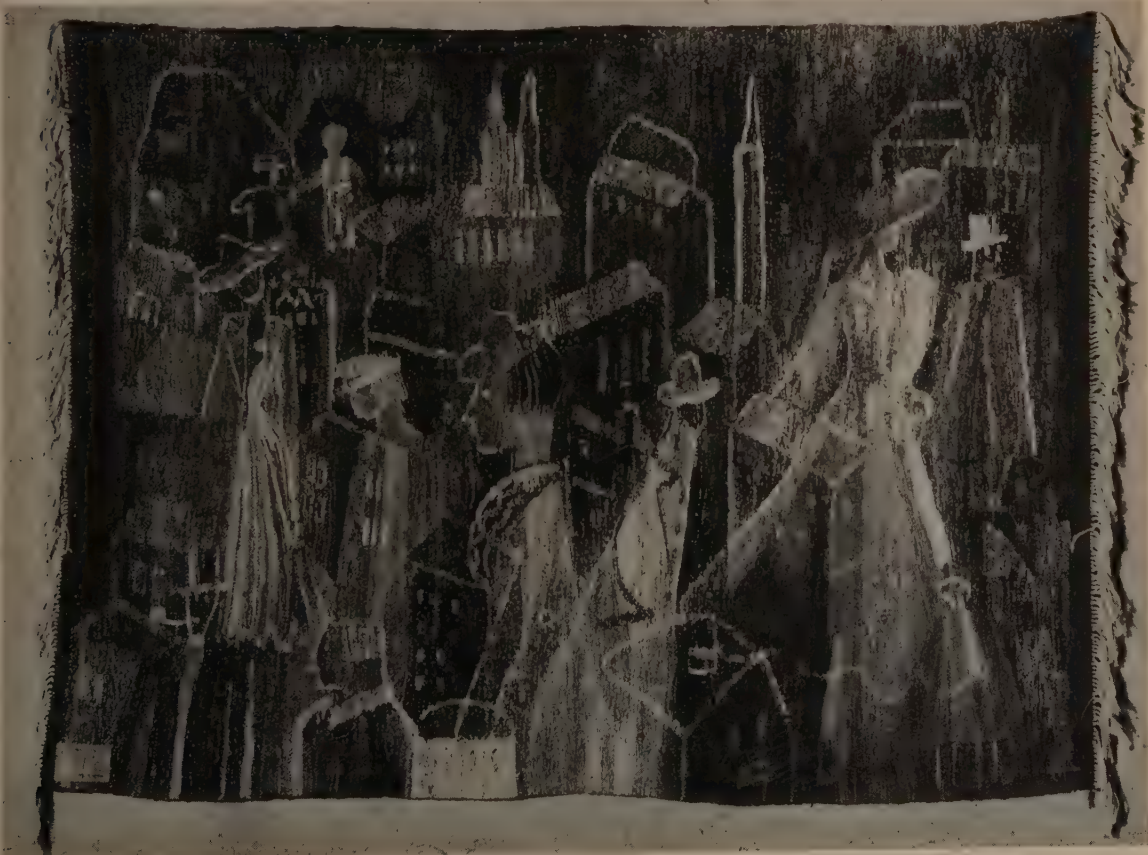
Mrs. Anttila's tapestries have been displayed for many years in major exhibitions in Finland, as well as throughout Europe and England. Two years ago she traveled with her work to museums in London and Gothenburg, winning great acclaim in both cities, and recently one-woman exhibitions of her paintings and tapes-

tries were held in Helsinki and Tampere, Finland.

Better known in America, perhaps, are the brilliant tapestries of Martta Taipale, whose studio is in her large country homestead in Itä-Pakila, just outside of Helsinki. About a year ago a showing of her work, gathered from the private collections of Henry Dreyfuss and others, was held in a Chicago gallery. Miss Taipale is very inventive in using a wide variety of materials; for years she has accumulated in large baskets huge tangles of yarn-scrap, strips shredded from old lace curtains, unraveled and dyed threads from parachute cords and other synthetic goods. In using very intense color and metallic yarns she differs from most Finnish weavers. In fact she is quite untraditional, except in her insistence upon adding a fringe to the finished piece.

Martta Taipale's tapestries are woven on ordinary floor looms with the full-scale drawing of a composition pinned under each warp. In weaving, every curved area is built up separately, the weft threads are beaten in with a small comb, and frequently a long thread is thrown around a whole curved area to outline it. Martta Taipale no longer does her own weaving, but plans the compositions and closely supervises her three or four artisans as they work, sometimes pulling out

Eva Anttila, *Street*, tapestry, photograph Nousiainen





Maritta Taipale, *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, 1949, photograph Kuva

a thread here and there and substituting a better choice. Frequently she makes an oil painting on glass, and pulls a rough monoprint of it on paper while it is wet; then the print is tacked up before the weaver to serve as a visual aid in showing desired colors and textural effects.

Since most of the Taipale tapestries are woven to be hung in churches, the subjects are usually religious themes. Her use of color is expressionistic, suggestive of Rouault, but her textures are quite primitive, showing the influence of her surroundings—the woods and rocks, apple trees, birch bark. The strong, naive quality of her design can be seen in *The Miraculous Draught of*

Fishes and *Adam and Eve*, completed in 1949.

Equally renowned in Finland through the Scandinavian textile world is Laila Karttunen, leading authority on Finnish handweaving and director of design at the famous Wetterhoff Institute in Hämeenlinna (Tavastehus). Miss Karttunen is chiefly concerned with perpetuating a national style based upon the most distinctive traditions in Finnish weaving. From her study of the folk art in all the provinces in Finland she has developed her own style of design, highly personal and dramatic, thoroughly Finnish in character and quite dependent upon the national weaving techniques. Perhaps the most uniquely

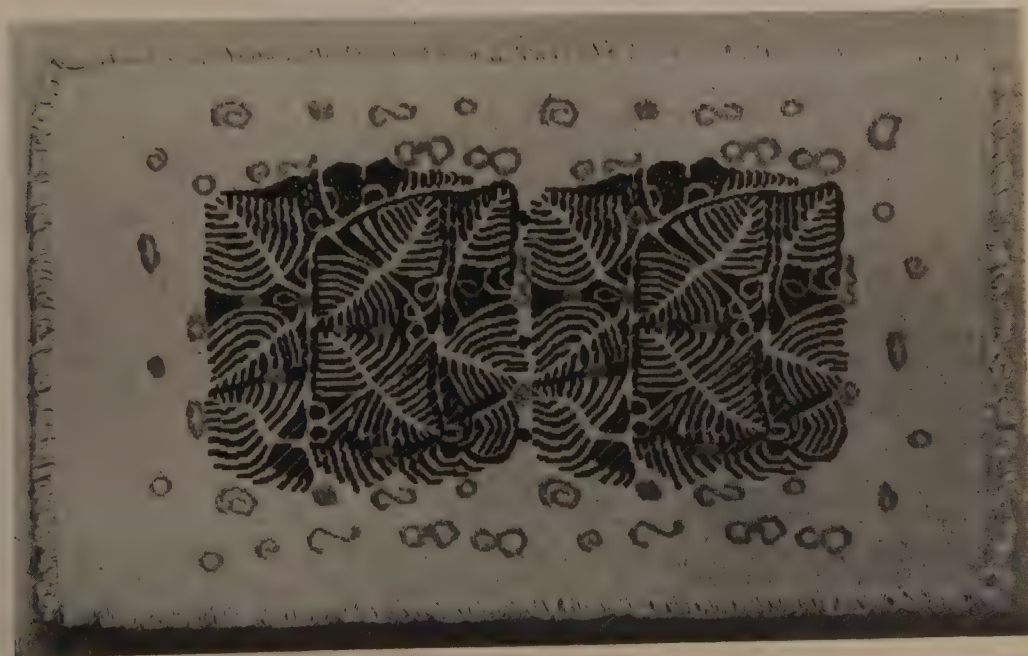


Finnish of these are the *riyya* (rug used as a wall-hanging) and the "double-weave" techniques. The colors are usually of rich earth hues, and the yarns mostly wool or linen; these are dyed by hand with vegetable or chemical pigments imported from Germany. Poetic, abstract style of design and a strong Finnish flavor are evident in Miss Karttunen's work. All her pieces are executed by professional weavers in the workshop maintained by the Institute.

For some years Laila Karttunen has been directing a survey of Finland's handwoven textiles, from which will be compiled an index of design for the whole country. The research is done largely by third-year students at the Wetterhoff Institute during the summer preceding their graduation. Each student preparing for a profession as teacher or weaver is required to make a study of representative hand-woven textiles in her own community—combing the rag bags, attics and farmhouses for bits of cloth woven according to local traditions. Each collection is carefully mounted in a portfolio with the student's written thesis and filed in the library of the Institute. Thus in time a complete and monumental documentary record of Finnish textile art will have been compiled for posterity.

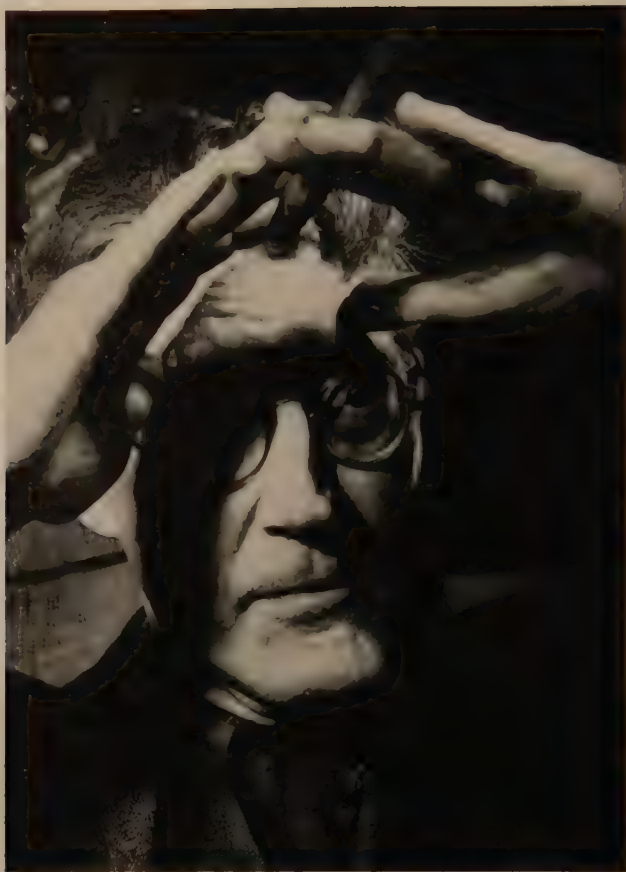
Laila Karttunen,
Linen hanging in double-weave technique,
photograph Sortila

Laila Karttunen,
Water Buttercups,
linen wall hanging



JOHN SLOAN

Forbes Watson



John Sloan jurying the Life-Cranbrook American Painting Show, 1941

IT makes a difference to the stability of a painter's production whether he flirts with painting or is married to it. All amateurs are flirts, although some of them eventually have a passionate affair with painting. I dare say that more professionals than we know are flirting, asking for the favors of art while unwilling, or unable, to meet its unremitting demand for dedication. John Sloan was married to painting, long and faithfully. Early in his career he had an affair with journalism, and the effects of that affair lasted throughout his life, coloring his art and in fact determining its character. I have seen him with newspaper men and with artists, and he seemed equally at home with both. He looked and talked as much like a journalist as like a painter.

Yet if we called him a journalist-painter his many ardent admirers would consider that he was being put on a lower plane than in reality he occupied. For the word "journalist" is one against

which most of us share a prejudice, not realizing that journalism at its best is an art which requires, to describe it, a majority of the terms needed in a fair description of John Sloan's art. Both these arts call for quick and keen observation, a feeling for the points that establish the locale and the ability to ignore the points that merely literalize the picture. Before the camera took over the visual reporting of events, the "sketch artist" had to meet the time schedule of the reporter. Already, as a student, Sloan gained practice in swift sketching; and how different, and in its way more exacting, the quick sketch of an actual event destined to be used immediately to point up the reporter's story was from the conventional quick sketching in the schools, is obvious. That this practice gave Sloan a love of speed and spontaneity in interpreting life is suggested by one of his last writings. In the catalogue for the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Exhibition of the Art Students League of New



Nude at Foot of Stairs, 1933, oil, 48 x 30", collection of artist's estate

York, Sloan wrote: "My early work was influenced by Frans Hals, Goya, Manet, men who interpreted life with speed and spontaneity."

I once asked Sloan why he went to New Mexico, because to me the move seemed out of character. I thought his answer would be enlightening. It was, but that was not the intention. He replied: "Oh, they think it's good for my health." That was undoubtedly true. No one, I'm sure, inspired him to observe the life of New York City by telling him that it would be good for his health, and perhaps New Mexico would have inspired him more if the problem of health had not come up. He may have had his starry-eyed moments towards New Mexico, because when I was there for a short visit I found everyone starry-eyed. Sloan, however, did not take possession of New Mexico in his full maturity as in earlier years he did take possession of New York City. (He moved

to New York in 1905 at the age of thirty-four.) Yet New Mexico gave him the opportunity he wanted and possibly needed to approach new material and evolve new methods. To judge by his work, and not by anything he said to me, there came a time in Sloan's maturity when, above everything else, he did not want to fall into a rut. That is an admirable desire, and every artist in every medium will admire the courage of a man who says in full success: "No, I've done that, and no matter how much you offer me I'm not going to repeat it."

In a talk with me about a year before he died, Sloan complained that exhibition managers wanted his old pictures and that he insisted on sending his new ones. In his last years this was a pet subject of Sloan's. He was like a father defending his youngest son against all those who preferred the older brother. In his late work he

had complete confidence. He would say that it took thirty years (an excusable exaggeration) to win recognition for his New York City subjects, and that it would probably take another thirty years for the new ones to be hailed. He did not, he said, expect to enjoy his second success personally, because he would be over a hundred by that time, but he did expect that his final paintings would win an even greater success than his early work. To quote the League catalogue again, Sloan wrote:

"In my work of the past twenty years I have sought to emphasize plastic realization. Through experiment and study of Renoir, Rubens, Rembrandt and Titian I came to an understanding of the importance of separating form and color, both in mental consciousness and technical procedure. Over a delicate under-painting of the form the realizing colors are glazed in the technical process of the Old Flemish and Italian painters. Linework in black and white drawing is accepted as a complete expression. To satisfy my demand for greater realization to be achieved through 'color graphics' I came to evolve a super glaze, a superimposed color texture to add significance to the form.

"It is my considered opinion that my work of the last twenty years, principally in the study of the nude, is of greater importance than the early city pictures."

Sloan's theory suggests that a painter who knows how to separate form and color, and how to build form with color, might write a most engaging imaginary conversation in which John Sloan and Paul Cézanne would be the disputants.

In the same catalogue Sloan also made the point that: "I have always been a realist, a humanist interested in life around me. But realism does not depend on subject matter. Reality is seen in the mind, it exists in the mind. . . ." And also, "The living artist does not usually have the opportunity to see his work in close proximity to the masterpieces of tradition as is the case in this exhibition in the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. . . . It is a responsible matter for one to make his own selection of a painting for such an occasion."

The particular painting that Sloan himself selected to represent his art at its best, especially since it would be seen under the same roof with "masterpieces of tradition," is called *Nude at Foot of Stairs*. It illustrates two of his favorite theses: that his latter-day procedure helped him to produce his greatest work and that artists should be allowed to select the picture that they wished to contribute to a general exhibition. Which thesis did Sloan prove?

Certainly the picture has no false allure. I think that he must have drawn this nude from memory at a time when his memory was not functioning at its best. Yet the painting does suggest two of Sloan's fundamental characteristics. It is

visual proof that at an age when many artists (moderns excepted), having won deserved success, are unwilling to disturb the bright current of events, Sloan dared to experiment and start afresh. By its harsh lack of appeal this painting evokes Sloan's undying spirit of independence. It is the most independent nude that I ever saw, independent of draftsmanship and at the same time independent in spirit, a declamatory symbol of John Sloan's fight to the hilt for his own beliefs.

With all his wit and pugnacity Sloan liked occasionally to play the martyr. He liked to think that against many enemies he had conquered an antipathetic world and that now he had another antipathetic world to conquer. Actually he was a successful artist according to his own dictate. Before either of them was fifty, he and Glackens said to me that any painter who was known before he was fifty was no good. At that time the thought was valid. The academies were in control and were still the strongest influence on the public taste. The museums bought their works, the forgotten collectors swallowed their claims, the big exhibitions were judged by their juries, and to them went the prizes.

Today the thought that the artist must wait until middle age before bathing in the sunlight of fame has no validity. Today the young are encouraged, and the rule of seniority, so dear to academism, is erased. The world in which the artist lives today is not the same world from which Sloan and Glackens gathered the experience which led them to set their fifty-year mark. The old, calm days when museum officials were content in their contemporary acquisitions to follow the academic trail vanished some years ago. Today they are wrestling hard with contemporary artist problems whose complexities neither Sloan nor the others dreamed of in their concentration on the academic boggy.

Sloan was fifty in 1921. He had already taught at the Art Students League of New York for seven years, had been President of the Society of Independent Artists for three years, had in 1913 been one of the sponsors of the Armory Show, had exhibited with "The Eight" and was indeed a leading figure in the rising independent movement. Victory for him and his group was in sight. The academic hold on the museums, on the large exhibitions and on the dealers who condescended to American art was slipping fast. The modern hold on them had another twenty years to wait before approaching its present strength. Meanwhile the Sloan, Henri, Luks, Glackens, Lawson, Shinn group and their younger associates, especially Bellows, were munching if not gorging on the fruits of success.

The lone hunter, Arthur B. Davies, secretive and mysterious, was the least realistic artist in "The Eight" but by all odds the most realistic business man. Like *The Ladies Home Journal*, he believed in never underestimating the power of a



Eve of St. Francis, Santa Fe, 1925, oil, 29½ x 39½", Wichita Art Museum

woman. The number of ladies whose purchases of art he quietly dominated gave him for some years a power which no other artist enjoyed. Also, with Walt Kuhn, Davies was influential in guiding John Quinn's later collecting. "The Eight" were represented in the Quinn collection by one Luks, a portrait of Quinn, fourteen Lawsons, nineteen Maurice Prendergasts, seventeen Davies (including sculptures), one wash drawing by Sloan and nothing by Henri, Shinn or Glackens. That pretty well indicates what one member of "The Eight" thought of the others. Incidentally Quinn owned fifty Walt Kuhns including sculptures.

While Sloan and his group were beginning their march towards success as our very best radicals, the Armory Show intervened. After Gutzon Borglum and Alden Weir had successively resigned from its presidency, its prospects began to look rather dubious. Then the quiet and mysterious Davies took over. His great executive abilities were brought out of the shadows into the open. The Armory had the kind of success which Davies approved, not the kind of success which advanced the cause of Sloan and the others who went to the life of the metropolis for their subjects. Every member of "The Eight" except Shinn was a member of the association which sponsored the Ar-

mory Show. The members also included the former Henri students, du Bois and Bellows.

Nevertheless, involved as Sloan and his group and their followers were in The Association of American Painters and Sculptors which gave the exhibition, the Armory Show made their paths to fame less easy. It cast a shadow across them. In that shadow appeared and reappeared the imp of modern art. Each time that it appeared it looked a little bigger, each time increasing the audience which was beginning to think that the Independents were not as advanced as they had appeared to be. Yet for years, indeed until the Museum of Modern Art was in full sway, the city-life realists felt that they were the advanced representatives of contemporary American painting. For that reason it was a tragedy for them, at the top of their fame, to lose their position as advanced leaders.

The members of the Henri-Sloan group who best weathered the storm were Bellows and Sloan, with the impregnable Hopper looking, painting and acting as if he remembered vaguely that someone had said something about modern art but he couldn't remember who it was. In thinking of this storm within a storm, one naturally wonders what would have happened to the repu-



Dust Storm, Fifth Avenue, 1906, oil, 22 x 27", Metropolitan Museum of Art

tation of Bellows or to his work if he had lived. I can't imagine his taking things as quietly as his surviving contemporaries who shared in his success. Several of them have receded into a world of dark hatred where they await the damnation of "modern art." But Sloan, as far as I saw and heard him, did not enter the world of futile hatred. After all, he was dedicated to independence of the mind and of expression, and whatever he may have thought of modern art he could not logically condemn its practitioners or adherents. We can observe that in his New Mexico paintings, and in his separation of form and color experiments with the nude, he drew nothing from the resources of the new trends. He remained the old independent Sloan. His early work supported him well, and he had a good time complaining—knowing that the cornerstone of his reputation was solidly set.

Meanwhile his quite different late pictures gave Sloan the pleasant confidence that he was as bold as any youngster who despises a hint of the objective. Artists who used to sell their pictures and thought themselves safely on the road to glory have said to me in recent years: "They don't buy

my stuff any more." No matter how philosophical their tone, there was a bitter glint in their eyes. It would be a little more than human to expect an artist of apparently established success to smile as he saw his success vanish. The curators, the directors, the collectors, the dealers stopped calling. He was, as the saying is—out! But Sloan was never out. He remained indelibly a part of New York. To whatever category they wished to assign his art, painting pure and simple or illustration, his light could not be extinguished.

If Sloan did sometimes break down and rave against the modern trends (trends being a very popular word just now), it must have been at a moment when his faith in independence lapsed. In the same League catalogue already referred to, he wrote: "Study of the ultra-modern movement leads me to appreciate the greater realization in more ancient masters irrespective of subject-matter interest." This is so polite and good-tempered a lament that the most sensitive "ultra-modern" could not object to it.

Sloan always presented himself to me as the broad-minded independent. Other men could

paint as they wished to. He would paint as he wished to. That was the whole story. Others might banish realism to a dark pre-modern era, but John Sloan considered himself as modern as the very day on which he painted. One of his pet aversions was impressionism. While he was fighting his way to success, the academies had embraced impressionism, using sugar for a medium. Anything the academies embraced was anathema to Sloan, and sweet painting of any kind was also anathema to him. A painter like the late Willard Metcalf painted with the sweetness he abhorred. On the other hand the important tenet on subject matter, which was as much a part of impressionism as the theory of light, was adopted by Sloan.

Going back to "The Eight," I remember well their single exhibition; it was held at the Macbeth Gallery, the first dealer to specialize in American art, then at 40th Street and Fifth Avenue. I have always been surprised that several historians have insisted on attempting to pin down this single show by a casual group as a landmark in the story of American realism. The one and only exhibition by "The Eight" did not impress

the public enough to tempt the group to repeat it. Even my friend, Guy Pène du Bois, close to the group as he was, wrote in his penetrating essay on Glackens: "With the exhibition, called The Eight Americans, held at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908, these men definitely began the Realist movement in America." What men? Were Davies and Prendergast American realists? Was Lawson or Glackens or Shinn? The three others were Henri, Luks and Sloan, and they were the only three out of eight whom the convenient term of American realism fits. Sloan had no illusions about "The Eight." In a gallantly flattering tribute to Juliana Force, he wrote: "The Eight had been just an accidental group show, friends of Henri, who were given . . . the opportunity to exhibit at Macbeth's for two weeks. Friends in the newspaper world started the publicity which gave the event more importance than we ever attached to it" (*Juliana Force and American Art, A Memorial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1949).

Friends in the newspaper world Sloan always had, as did the other members of the Philadelphia group, Glackens, Henri, Luks and Shinn,

Backyards, Greenwich Village, 1914, oil, 26 x 32", Whitney Museum of American Art





Pigeons, 1910, oil, 26 x 32", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

the last survivor of "The Eight." Huneker, Fitzgerald and later critics all knew them. Fitzgerald in fact married Glackens' sister-in-law. Only one or two academic painters who earned pocket money by writing art criticism, like Ben Foster writing for the *New York Post* and Arthur Hoeber writing for the old *Globe*, fumed and fussed. For years no one was considered decently unacademic who did not praise their wares.

Sloan was a coat trailer, not the type of Irish legend inviting a fight, but sufficiently pugnacious to invite an argument. He preferred to discuss the wrongs of society, a not uncommon trait. Although he could not win first prize as a logician he won it easily as a wit. Once when we were discussing a prevalent subject of the moment—whether it would benefit American art and artists if the United States had a Secretary of Art of Cabinet rank—Sloan said it would be a fine idea because "then you'd know where your enemies were." When he set out to shock his audience, large or small, his fun was the pungent phrase, the witticism for which there was no answer.

Sloan rather liked an audience, and audi-

ences generally liked Sloan. He thought himself more radical than he was and referred proudly to his socialist ideas. He was proud that he drew for the *Masses* and proud that he liked the anarchist Emma Goldman—a well-fed bourgeois type, to judge by Henri's portrait of her. Whether Sloan knew enough about socialism or communism or anarchism to make clear to some of our Congressmen that they are not identical triplets, I do not know. I doubt it. The central thought and feeling that motivated Sloan as man and artist was, I repeat, independence. He was such an arrant independent that he once said that he hated people who had dogs as pets, because they kept them in a state of dependence, which is an undignified state for man or animal.

Wit can do a lot. It keeps Sloan's art out of the dull precincts of self-righteous social consciousness. His human sympathy was generous and expansive. Take his *Dust Storm, Fifth Avenue*, for example. There is a feeling of playfulness in his depiction of the elements upsetting the schedules of little human beings. It is original and full of witty observation.

Sloan's *Backyard, Greenwich Village*, is the sort of picture which, incredible as it seems today, gave birth to bitter attacks by the kind of academician who exercised his eyes only on studio arrangements. Such a delightful picture as *Backyard*, with its fresh human observation and good design, with gaiety and affection, contained elements which the academic mind of that time condemned without a second look. The boys and the snowman and the cat were proper, but the line of wash with intimate garments waving in the breeze for all the neighbors to see—that was slummy. A gentleman artist who had spent the day in his stage-set studio painting a large fat dead fish on a shining copper platter could sniff at a man who wasted the noble substance of oil paint showing how the poor lived.

Pigeons is another example of Sloan's originality born out of his powers to observe. Everyone who has ridden on the elevated has seen boys and men on roofs exercising their pigeons. Sloan was the first to see a picture in the subject. He was the first to see a great many things, but variants on the subjects he discovered became nu-

merous later. Sloan's unconventional and effortless response to unposed life is the basis of his originality. There was no striving to be original.

The *Haymarket* shows the most famous nightclub of its time. Unlike nightclubs today, this one was frankly not respectable. No ladies entered; merely gentlemen and streetwalkers. The gentlemen paid admission; the streetwalkers entered free. Beer was five cents, and there was a stage show, a dance floor and a piano. Also there was a gallery where gentlemen could extend their social circle, and after college football games the place became quite crowded. It was a landmark, but no academician considered it a proper subject for a painting. This was really low life. Men said so even after they had been to a Julian's Ball or the Quatz' Arts in Paris. It was excusable for French painters to notice such places in Paris and to paint them; but for an American to paint them in New York—and on Sixth Avenue in the heart of the then red-light district—that was going too far.

The lady entering and the male observer are nice touches that date the picture and characterize the place. Well seen and well composed,

Haymarket, 1907, oil, 26 x 31 7/8", The Brooklyn Museum



this is a work of art, a page in the teeming record that is John Sloan's.

McSorley's Bar is another old New York landmark beneath the notice of the more gentlemanly artists of the day. Sloan felt its character. After he saw it many artists went there. His painting of it is another New York document. Sloan had a remarkable sense of the character of places and of the life that went on in and about them. This curious sense of place is a special sense, and as I said at the beginning, good journalist writers have it and good journalist painters have it.

In these reminiscences little has been said of Sloan's New Mexico paintings, because his work in New Mexico seems to me at its best to contain only half as much of Sloan as his work in New York. Nevertheless, like his experiments with the nude, they were always Sloan. There was but one—*independent*—Sloan.

If I were curator of prints in a museum I should certainly buy a set of John Sloan's etchings. They show how near he could come to satire and malice. They are a remarkable social record of the time and they are fun.

Wherever you met Sloan you knew beforehand that the gathering would not settle into snoozy gossip. His weapons against stuffiness were acid and wit. He aimed his shafts with the skill of years of practice. They were not poisonous; they were awakening. Just so in his black and whites he did not draw to kill. He found such figures as the overstuffed ladies in *Fifth Avenue Critics* both amusing and ridiculous. He aimed always to link his satire with wit.

Guy Pène du Bois presents his views of New York City life with satire; Edward Hopper sees New York as the city of loneliness; Jerome Myers saw it with sentiment; George Bellows with a strong arm; William Glackens with gaiety of spirit; George Luks alternated bravado with poetry. John Sloan saw it straight, with humor and human feeling.

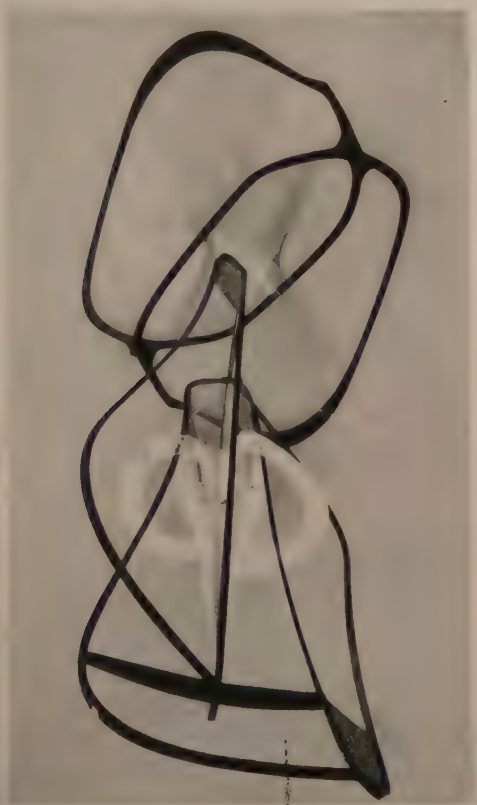
Note: The "John Sloan Retrospective Exhibition" which opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art on January 10th will remain there until March 2nd. It will be on view at the Corcoran Gallery of Art from March 15th to April 20th and at the Toledo Museum of Art from May 4th to June 8th. All illustrations in this article are reproduced through the courtesy of the Whitney Museum.

Fifth Avenue Critics, 1905, etching, 5 x 6 7/8", Whitney Museum of American Art



A NEW CONSTRUCTION FOR BALTIMORE

Naum Gabo



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THE modern architect is beginning to realize that on many occasions the new architecture requires the collaboration of the artist. This demand is more insistent than it was a generation ago, perhaps owing to the public's desire to give the artist's imagination scope in which to speak freely, perhaps because the architect through his own experience has come to the conclusion that free imaginative work is needed to accentuate the visual impact of the structure that he has designed. Nevertheless there is still practically no coordination between the two fields. A great deal remains to be learned and much experience must be gained before organized unity is achieved.

The modern architect, on the one hand, considers that he is actually making a concession in inviting an artist to execute a sculpture or a painting in his building. From the outset his own purely architectural and structural forms have

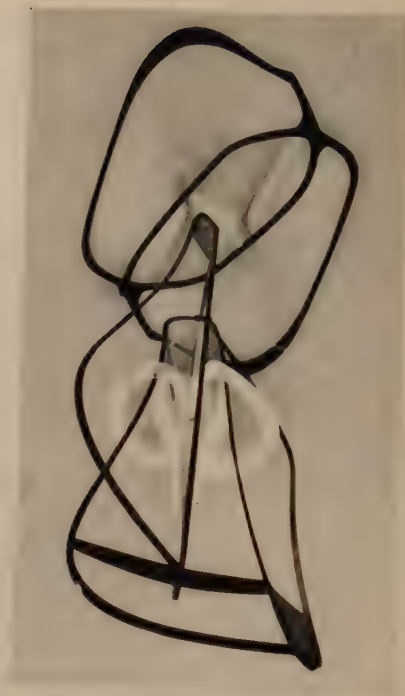
dominated his imagination. When on the completion of the building the architect is suddenly and unexpectedly faced with the necessity of putting into it a work of art, he does not look upon this as a welcome contribution to his creation, but rather as a foreign element which he must apply or insert to fill up a space or a surface that happens to be empty. Judging the work of art from this point of view, he gives little thought to its integration into his architectural concept. His concern is mainly with the question of whether or not a given sculpture or painting merits his acceptance through its own esthetic qualities. Under these circumstances his personal taste is his only guide. This, of course, also puts him in the very awkward position of a go-between. And since it adds one more difficulty to the many obstacles he has already had to surmount in getting his modern design through the barrier of his client's resistance, the architect naturally tends to be even more antagonistic to the whole artistic project.

At the same time such a state of affairs necessarily condemns the work of art to a mere casual existence in the building. Having been brought into the architecture as an extraneous object, the work may at any time be replaced by another one, without detriment to the building, the specific location in the building, or even for that matter to the work of art itself.

The artist, for his part—and particularly the sculptor, since his medium is more fused than any of the other visual arts with architecture—regards the structure as a God-given place where his work can be installed. This work, however, he had conceived as representing an independent image belonging to a world of its own, and having an existence of its own, irrespective of where it is placed or from what angle it is seen. Although such a conception may be justified when the artist's work is thought of separately for its own sake or viewed as an image of communication only, it is quite out of place when the work is intended to form part of a particular spatial environment or meant to contribute to a given architectural structure.

While such contrary attitudes prevail, there can be no unification of art and architecture into an organic whole. The problem, however, is one which the architecture of all previous great epochs has solved successfully. Our contemporary architecture, too, will have to solve it sooner or later if it is to survive the danger of becoming a

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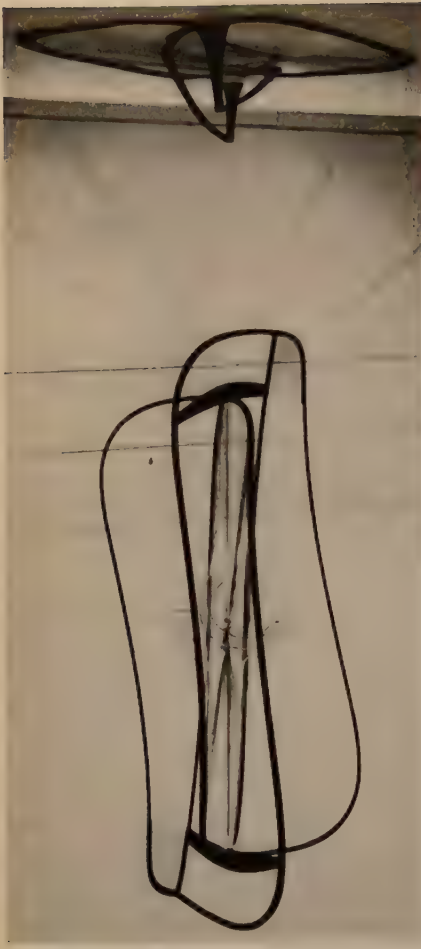
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mere episode of fashion in the annals of history.

In my opinion, the problem can be solved only when artist and architect are guided by the same conception from beginning to end of an architectural design. The artist's work should not be a mere appendage to the finished structure, but an organic part of its whole theme. The artist himself should therefore be incorporated into the entire process of the architectural design from its inception to its completion. But before this can come about the artist, particularly, will have to undergo a thorough re-education and acquire a great deal more skill, knowledge and conceptual latitude than he has ever needed before.

I am constructivist. I do not believe that boundless fantasy is necessarily the right vehicle for creative processes. In my experience, limitations and boundaries set to our imagination may actually serve as a source of inspiration rather than a hindrance.

It may be of some interest in this connection to describe a particular case in which I recently had to face some of the very problems referred to above.

The building for which I was invited to make a sculptural construction is the new wing of

the Baltimore Museum of Art, donated by the late Mrs. Saidie A. May as a center for children's art activities. The place is a three-story stair well where the stairs provide the only means of communication between the three floors. At the outset, I was asked to produce a work to hang from the ceiling of the third floor and extend between the third and second floors. It was also suggested that the work should be kinetic—that is, it should actually move. It was not difficult, however, to carry my point that a moving construction in a place where the stairs provide the only means of access from one floor to another would constitute a traffic hazard. It is psychologically inevitable that in such a position a moving object would add to congestion, since people going up and down the stairs would naturally stop to watch to see what happens next.

It seemed obvious to me that, whatever image I might finally conceive, its structure should not impede the function of the stairs, but that instead my image might actually profit by utilizing the movement of the spectators. In effect, the spiral movement of the ascending or descending spectator, if it is incorporated in the conception of the structure, would give an imaginary movement to the sculpture.

For that given problem this seemed to me the only solution. Having committed myself to it in theory, it became my task to solve it in practice. This, however, was not the only difficulty in the assigned space. There was also the limitation that the construction had to be suspended from the ceiling. I had to find a solution that would avoid an association between my image and a chandelier—which to me is an antiquated object totally out of place in the new constructive conception of space. Apart from that, I had to take into account the fact that the observer would inevitably be looking at the work not only from a series of points on a horizontal plane, but also from all the points along the vertical axis of the spiral periphery of the stairs as well.

Such were the conditions which that particular place imposed. For me it was an inescapable decision that the very concept of my final image must satisfy these structural conditions. Otherwise, the whole work would lose all justification for existing in that particular environment.

Though the task was far from easy and the limits to my imagination were severe, I am convinced that in the long run this proved an incentive to the creative process, rather than an impediment.

Construction of aluminum, phosphor bronze, plastic, stainless steel and rolled-gold wire, Saidie A. May Wing, Baltimore Museum of Art. Photographs by Jerome H. Abrams, Baltimore. 1, View from foot of stairs; 2, view between first and second floors; 3, view from second floor landing; 4 and 5, views between second and third floors; 6, view from third-floor landing.

WRITING AND PAINTING IN CHINA

A. Hyatt Mayor

Note: We used to talk of recognizing a painter's handwriting. Today our children are taught to use typewriters. Perhaps in reaction against the increasing suppression in the West of the natural craft of calligraphy, many of our recent painters have shown an interest in Chinese writing which has flowed so easily from penmanship into art. Readers will remember Mark Tobey's article in the October, 1951, MAGAZINE OF ART. His concern and that of other artists makes Mr. Mayor's article especially timely.

CHINESE characters have the advantage of being like mathematical signs that convey the same idea to people who pronounce them differently. Thus when we see 2×3 we say *two times three*, the Frenchman says *deux fois trois*, the German *zwei mal drei* and so on. In theory it would be possible to learn to read Chinese writing without knowing how to pronounce a single Chinese word. In vast, slow-traveling China, where different provinces speak languages almost as different as English and German, Chinese writing has done more than any other force to unite the country. A Cantonese cannot understand a man from Peking if he talks, but can if he writes. Among occidentals the most international people are musicians and mathematicians because they communicate with each other largely by sign writing. If Europeans and Americans had always written one set of signs for ideas that all could read, we might not be separated by such misunderstandings today.

An alphabetic spelling like ours would not only tend to split China into warring districts, but it would be unable to record even one dialect. The Chinese speak in words of one syllable and use most words as verbs, nouns or adjectives without any change. A Chinese page presents columns of unpunctuated chunks of meaning that are hard to break up into sentences. Chinese schoolboys have to learn to group characters into sentences by repeating the phrases that a teacher reads aloud from some classic text.

Since Chinese has few sounds (no "R," for instance) some of the one-syllable words have to do duty for over fifty meanings. The Chinese help to distinguish between the various meanings of a syllable by chanting it in as many as eight tones. They made a pronouncing dictionary as early as 543 A.D., but obviously no alphabet can record a language of puns.

Very early the Chinese must have let some picture signs stand for other words that were


pronounced the same way. Suppose we had been in the habit of writing *ball* by a drawing: ○. We might then use this same simple drawing to mean *ball* in the sense of a dance, which is harder to draw. Gradually ○ would cease to represent a thing and would represent a sound wherever it occurred, as in *cani○*, or *○oon*. The Chinese who scratched writing on bones about 1300 B.C. were already combining sound signs with picture signs as they have done ever since. For instance, a catapult is called *pao*. To make a word for *cannon* they combined the picture sign *fire* with the sound sign *pao*: "fire-pao." So many Chinese words are double words that they almost make a two-syllable language.

Chinese words describe particulars but do not generalize. They have no general word for *old man*, but use descriptions of particular kinds of old men—he who eats richer food, he who wheezes, etc. It is as though we had names for stallion, mare, foal, yearling, pinto, gelding, trotter, pony, mustang, percheron, but no general word for horse. These vivid, hard, concrete Chinese words explode with the force of "Squads right!" They make splendid poetry and record vast labors in descriptive science—geography, agriculture, botany, astronomy, etc., in which the Chinese were often centuries ahead of Europe. But in spite of the forty thousand characters of literary Chinese and the more than three thousand needed for an everyday newspaper, Chinese can hardly express the abstract thought of chemistry, physics or mathematics. As Fenellosa said, "In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate."

The Chinese would find it hard to break away from concrete words because they see pictures in so much of their writing. Chinese picture signs are not exact drawings of things, like Egyptian hieroglyphs, but are more like action sketches. Egyptian hieroglyphs are as unmistakable as the beer bottle on a billboard. Chinese picture signs are as abstract as road signs:



Road signs are snippets of maps and do not picture what the motorist will see through his

windshield; they command what his muscles must do. Chinese characters command actions. For instance, the Chinese have a character that they pronounce *chang* meaning *grow*, or *ch'ang* meaning *long* or *chief*. Some Chinese see in this character a sketch of long hair caught up by a clasp, while others see a horse-headed man. Both images recall primitive dances for forcing crops and herds to grow. In one dance the chief and his wives whirled around in order to send their power forth by letting their long hair fly. In the other dance men on horses with flowing manes rode in a circle to surround and compel the god of growth. It does not matter which magic the writing may sketch because both magics force nature to do man's will. Pronouncing *chang*, therefore, is like uttering a spell, and writing the sign:  is like making an amulet. The Chinese say that when man inventing the fiends fled having now lost their

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When different men see different pictures in characters, they naturally begin to imagine images that may never have been there in the beginning. The modern Chinese has invented a whole world of poetic and fanciful emblems in his writing. When he writes the character for "love" he sees the image of a mother and child. Therefore when he sees an actual mother and her child, he thinks of the word "love." Everything in nature suggests something human or mythical as promptly as a pine tree with candles suggests Christmas to us. They see a gnarled peach tree and think of happy old age. They see two ducks and think of a husband and wife who love each other. They see a writhing cloud and think of dragons escaping. Pictures suggest ideas, and ideas are written with pictures, until the two blend together as naturally for the Chinese as words and music do for us. As a Chinese poet says:

*"First we look at the hills in a painting,
Then we look at the painting in the hills."*

The Chinese does not see himself as a special creation set apart from the rest of nature, as the Jews and Greeks have taught us to see ourselves. He is one with the tiger and the wind, his strength moves with theirs, and he dances their dance to govern them. By writing and drawing he commands through understanding and becomes the thing that he sketches in a word sign or a painting. We can sometimes approach such a state of mind, though passively, by becoming "a green thought in a green shade."

When calligraphy both expresses and inspires the imagination, it is natural that the great Chinese writers have not been professional writing masters, but painters, poets, statesmen or

scholars. Since they write and paint with the same ink, brushes and brush strokes, writing and painting almost fuse into one art. When a Chinese learns to observe tiny differences in characters, he also learns to observe and remember everything about him. A scholar who has stocked his memory with thousands of characters can recall the look of a misty mountain or a feeding duck sharply enough to draw them at home in his study. Our scholars, who only have to visualize twenty-six simple diagrams and concentrate their whole attention on abstract concepts, usually become blind to pictures.

When a Chinese paints a picture and writes a poem on the same page, the two blend together more harmoniously than any other kind of painting and writing. The poem would lack support without the painting, and the painting would look lopsided without the poem.



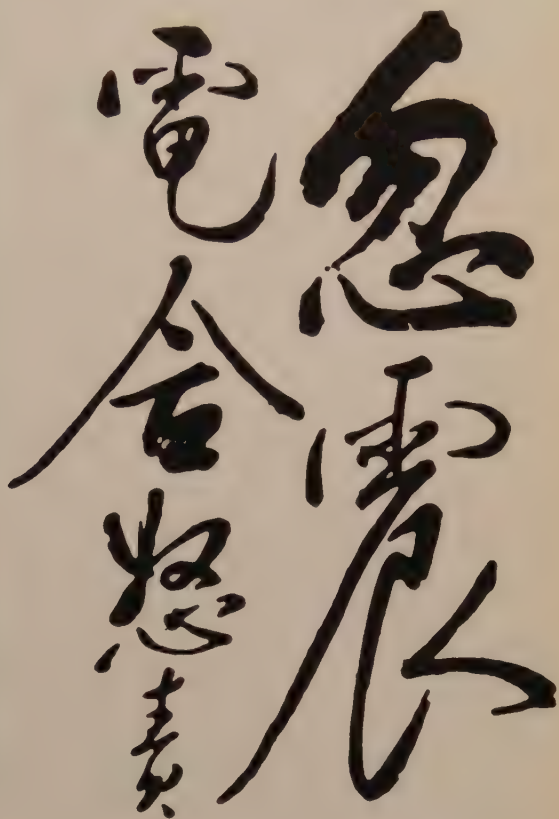
Our alphabet never blends so well into a picture. We string our letters out along the bottom or cramp them into one corner as though they marred the painting. But the Chinese carry writing through into drawing, and drawing into writing.

Like all great draftsmen, the great Chinese calligraphers write from trained inspiration and can no more repeat or copy an inspired piece of writing than a great painter can repeat a sketch with identical effect. No wonder that great writers achieve as much fame in China as great painters do with us. The Chinese admire their writing for the same reasons that we admire our drawing

(Michelangelo's, for instance)—for its character and energy. They call good writing “bone and muscle,” and bad writing “piggy fat.” They classify writing by its speed and divide it into standing, walking and running scripts. They compare characters to clouds battling or to cavalry charging or a grassfield flaming. Even a dot suggests a stone plunging down a cliff. Here is stately standing writing:



Here is running, raging writing that describes thunder and lightning in a pattern like a controlled explosion:



This black-and-white is beautiful without so much as a dot added for ornament because it moves and breathes. The Chinese are right to prize their writing, for a master can shape it into the freest and grandest in the world.

Notes on the illustrations: Page 75: International road signs. Page 76: Orchid, painting and writing by Chang Hsiang-ho (1786-1862), Metropolitan Museum of Art. Page 77, left: Rubbing from character cut in stone, Wei Dynasty (sixth century), Metropolitan Museum of Art; right: Chinese poem, tenth century.

EASEL—SCROLL—FILM

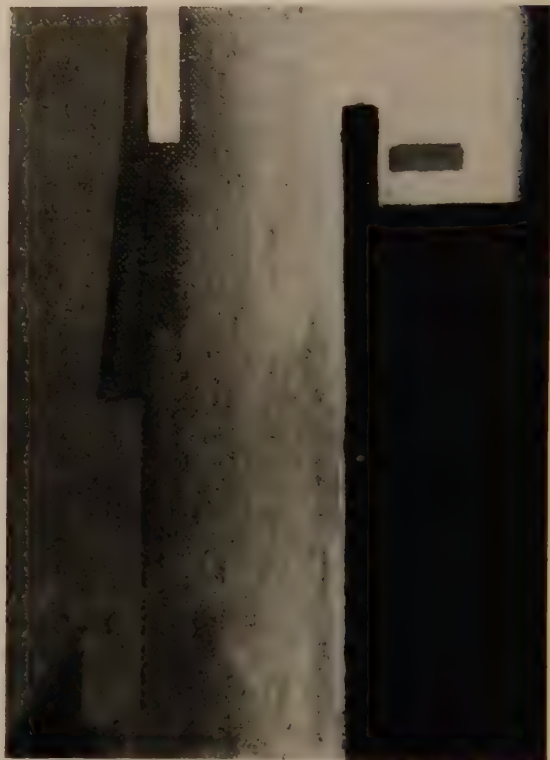
Hans Richter



“THE square is the sign of a new humanity. It is something like the cross of the early Christians.” That is what Theo van Doesburg told the Swedish painter, Viking Eggeling, and me on his arrival at our country retreat in Klein Koelzig, Germany, in 1920. We were a little perturbed and skeptical about van Doesburg’s statement, but we understood its spirit. We felt as he did. Through some magic, a new unity of purpose in the arts had developed in Europe during the isolation of the war years. Now that the war was over, there suddenly existed a kind of esthetic brotherhood, secretly developed. Whether or not the square was its symbol seemed to us of no importance in comparison to the fundamental issues upon which we could all agree.

We had seen, after 1910, that representation of the object had declined. We saw it finally vanish as a goal of painting. The self-respect of abstract art was increasing. A new set of problems arose. The overwhelming freedom which the “abstract,” “pure,” “absolute,” “non-objective,” “concrete” and “universal” form offered (which, indeed, was thrust upon us) carried responsibilities. The “heap of fragments” left to us by the cubists did not offer us an over-all principle. Such a principle was needed to save us from the limitless horizons of possible form-combinations, so that we might attain a sovereignty over this new matter and justify this new freedom.

The upheaval of World War I, I am sure, had something to do with this urge for “order.” I myself felt the need to establish an Archimedean standpoint, to penetrate the chaos which threatened from every direction. It appeared a physical necessity to articulate the multicolored darkness with a definite simplicity. But whether it was a desire for “security,” as the psychologists would see it (to find order in chaos), or an overwhelming



Hans Richter, Head, oil, 1918. Positive and negative relationships.

general trend towards collective standards, as the sociologists might call it, or the all-penetrating influence of science—the fact remains that a new generation approached this task with the energy of pioneers, the curiosity of explorers and the unperturbed objectivity of scientists.

It was with this aim, in this spirit, and at this time, that Malevitch in Russia decided to start from the very beginning again, from “nihil,” with his *White on White*; that in Holland, fifteen hundred miles to the west, Mondrian, Doesburg and their friends discovered in the “equivalence of opposites” a working principle, a principle of style which they termed “neo-plasticism,” based on the opposition of horizontal and vertical (excluding all others); and that six hundred miles to the south again, in Switzerland, the Swedish artist Viking Eggeling and I found another way to tackle the same task: by approaching it with the principle of counterpoint in mind, from the standpoint of polarity. The principle of counterpoint is not limited to music. For us, it was more than a technical device; it was a philosophic way of dealing with the experience of growth.

So strong was this historical impulse to establish "a 'New Order' that might restore the balance between heaven and hell" (as Arp put it), that it expressed itself practically simultaneously, though independently, in various places on the globe. It carried Eggeling and me (painters and nothing but painters) eventually, and half against our will, out of the world of easel painting to that of scrolls, and finally into film.

An account of the path we followed, our considerations and doubts, the experiences we went through thirty years ago, may be of some value to the ever-increasing number of artists who prefer the world of non-representational visions to the temptations of the representational object. It may also help to break down the stupid prejudice that plastic problems in the art of our time can be solved only on canvas or in bronze.

Influenced by cubism and its search for structure, but not satisfied with what it offered, I found myself between 1913-18 increasingly faced with the conflict of suppressing spontaneous expression in order to gain an objective understanding of a fundamental principle with which I could control the "heap of fragments" inherited from the cubists. Thus I gradually lost interest in the subject—in any subject—and focused instead on the positive-negative (white-black) opposition, which at least gave me a working hypothesis whereby I could organize the relationship of one part of a painting to the other. In doing so, "form," as such, became a handicap and was replaced by straight or curved divisions of the canvas, which in itself became a surface on which opposites were to be organized. Repetition of the same element on different parts of the canvas, and repetitions with minor or major variations, permitted a certain control.

One day at the beginning of 1918 while I was engaged in this struggle, Tristan Tzara knocked at the wall which separated our rooms in a little hotel in Zurich and introduced me to Viking Eggeling. He was supposed to be involved in the same kind of esthetic research. Ten minutes later, Eggeling showed me some of his work. Our complete agreement on esthetic as well as on philosophical matters, a kind of "enthusiastic identity" between us, led spontaneously to an intensive collaboration, and a friendship which lasted until his death in 1925.

Whereas I had only started, Eggeling had already developed a complete theory and functioning system. Like me, he had taken as his point of departure the cubist concept of elementary form, but he had found in Henri Rousseau a technique of "orchestration" (the plants in Rousseau's "virgin forest" pictures, for example, the trees in his alleys, the little men like musical notes in his long streets), which helped to clarify the way for him. Eggeling's dynamics of counterpoint, which he called *Generalbass der Malerei*, embraced generously and without discrimination every possible relationship between forms, including that of the

horizontal to the vertical. His approach, methodical to the degree of being scientific, led him to the analytical study of the behavior of elements of form under different conditions. He tried to discover which "expressions" a form would and could take under the various influences of "opposites": little against big, light against dark, one against many, top against bottom, and so forth. By connecting ("equilibrating") the strongest contrasts of the most varied order intimately with their opposites through similarities which he termed "analogies," he could control an unlimited multiplicity of relationships. Contrasting elements were used to dramatize two or more complexes of forms; "analogies" were used within the same complexes of forms to relate them again.

As much as we both loved the early work of Kandinsky, we still thought that such free improvisations as his would have to come "later," after a general principle had been established. (What made it right in Kandinsky's work was the still existing impressionistic basis, or at least a definite contact with a definite object.) This principle would be the challenge, a point of resistance, against any anarchistic abuse of freedom and, as such, a psychological stimulus—not a chain.

We saw in the completely liberated (abstract) form not only a new medium to be exploited, but the challenge towards a "universal language." This, as we wrote in a pamphlet called *Universelle Sprache*, which we published in 1920, was to be a means of emotional and intellectual experience for all, one which would restore to the arts its social function.

We sought to achieve a more than purely subjective solution; we felt very definitely prepared to sacrifice whatever had to be sacrificed of individual spontaneous expression, for the time being, in order to clarify and "purify" the material—form and color—until the very principle itself became expressive: "to carry on in the same way as Nature organizes matter, but to use only its principles, not its forms," in Eggeling's words.

Two years after our first meeting, these ideas were to bring us into association with van Doesburg and later with Mondrian, Malevitch, Gabo, Mies van der Rohe, Lissitzky and others.

The collaboration between Eggeling and myself had a number of consequences:

1. Our research led us to make a large number of drawings as transformations of one form element or another. These were our "themes," or, as we called them, "instruments," by analogy with music—the art form which inspired us considerably. We felt "the music of the orchestrated form."

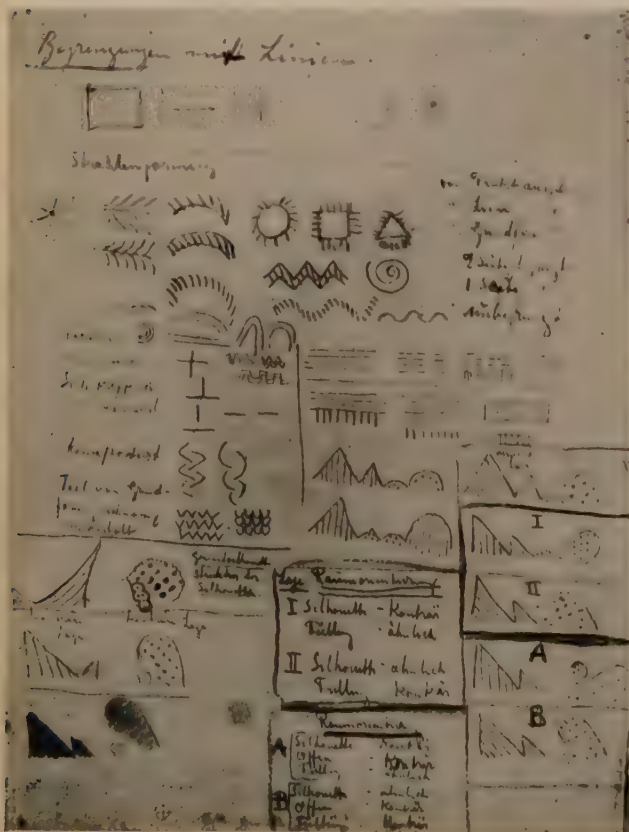
2. This methodical contrast-analogy, "orchestration" of a given "instrument" through different stages, forced upon us the idea of a continuity.

3. When in 1919 we finally established a definite line of continuity on long scrolls, we became aware of a multiple and dynamic kind of relationship which invited the eye to "meditate."



Viking Eggeling, Worksheets of orchestrations, c. 1915.

Above: Natural objects; below: Abstractions from natural objects.



Viking Eggeling, Orchestration of the Line, 1917-18

The contrast-analogy process had created an energy which grew as the relationships multiplied. The beginning set up, as planned, rapports with the end, the first part with the second, the second with the third, left with right, top with bottom, every part with every other. Without intending to, we had arrived at a kind of dynamic expression which produced a sensation rather different from that possible in easel painting. This sensation lies in the stimulus which the remembering eye receives by carrying its attention from one detail, phase or sequence, to another that can be continued indefinitely. This is because the esthetic theme is just that: the relationship between every part and the whole. In so following the creative process, the beholder experiences it as a *process*, not as a single *fact*. In this way, the eye is stimulated to an especially active participation, through the *necessity of memorizing*; and this activity carries with it the kind of satisfaction which one might feel if one were suddenly to discover new or unusual forms of one's imagination.

These seem to me the main characteristics of the scroll, which offers sensations that the easel painting, by its very nature as a static form, cannot offer. Van Doesburg, though, tried to make a different point. "It makes no difference whether one who looks at a Mondrian canvas moves his eyes (from one 'opposite' to the other) or whether a scroll 'moves' before the eyes of the beholder." Well, I think he had a point there but only a polemic one, as the *attitude* of the creator and the spectator is different in each case.

I consider the scroll as a new (dating from 4000 B. C.!) art form which, despite "sociological difficulties" that it might encounter (such as being despised by art dealers as too difficult to sell, or finding no room for its display over a potential purchaser's fireplace) ought to become a modern medium of expression. It must, in fact, as there are sensations to be derived from it which can be experienced in no other way, either in easel painting or in film.

I see in the elongated, horizontal paintings of artists like Tanguy, Klee, Miro and others, the same impulse to express similar sensations. There are "messages" to be told and "messages" felt which make the traditional limits of easel painting inadequate as communication.

One may assume that the Egyptians and the Chinese felt the appeal of this particular form of expression, and that they enjoyed arresting time in this way. Otherwise this form would not have evolved nor been preserved, as it still is in China today. The static unity which binds together the dynamic sequences is the form of the whole scroll. The unity of time is the same as in the easel painting, although its expression is fundamentally different. In the scroll painting, the orchestration of all stages of development of form is seen and felt simultaneously—backwards and forwards. This is one of the main distinctions

of this new plastic expression and a source of its real beauty. "Becoming and duration are not in any way a diminution of unchanging eternity; they are its expression. Every form occupies not only space but time. Being and becoming are one. . . . What should be grasped and given form are things in flux" (Eggeling).

The logical step we had taken to the scroll had already thrown us, so to speak, out of the world of easel painting. It precipitated us a step further. After each of us in 1919 had finished his first scroll, we began to understand that we had gotten more than we asked for; the necessity to release this accumulated "energy" into actual movement! Never during our collaboration had we dreamt of that. But there it was. And movement implied film!

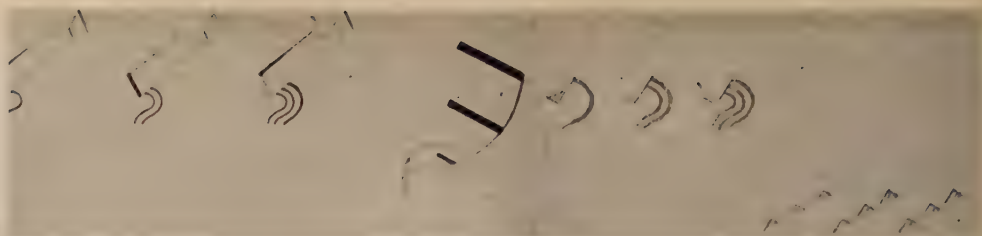
Few people have ever come to this medium so unexpectedly and with so much inner resistance. We knew no more about cameras and film than what we had seen in shop windows.

In 1921 Eggeling finished the first version of his *Diagonal Symphony* (after his second set of scrolls) and I completed my film, *Rhythm 21*. We were in a new medium altogether. It was not only the orchestration of form but also of time—relationship that we were facing in film. The single image disappeared in a flow of images, which made sense only if it helped to articulate a new element—*time*.

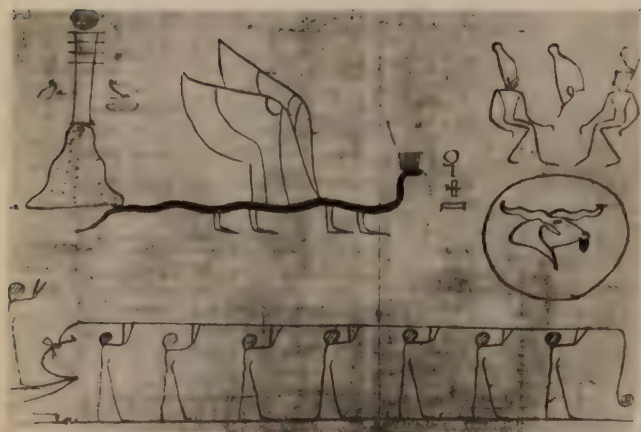
We realized that the "orchestration" of time was the esthetic basis of this new art form. Eggeling stuck to the graphic elegance of the forms developed in his scrolls. He endowed the different "instruments" with certain well-defined ways of motion. He really used them according to the musical term "instrument." But as they were products of the painter, they put innumerable obstacles in the way of the "filmer." It was then, and especially for him, a non-professional, a Herculean task. His film was remade three times under the most incredible conditions before he was satisfied.

I dissented from the start. It had taken an UFA technician more than a week to animate a single drawing of my scroll, "Prelude." The technician was not very encouraging to begin with, and I felt like a blind man being led by another blind man. I wanted to understand better what I was doing and decided, very much against Eggeling's arguments, to start from scratch again—using the principle of counterpoint to guide me. This time I did not concentrate upon orchestrating *form*—but *time*, and time alone.

The simple square of the movie screen could easily be divided and "orchestrated." These divisions or parts could then be orchestrated in *time* by accepting the rectangle of the "movie-canvas" as the form element. Thus it became possible to relate (in contrast-analogy) the various movements on this "movie-canvas" to each other—in a formal as well as a temporal sense. In other



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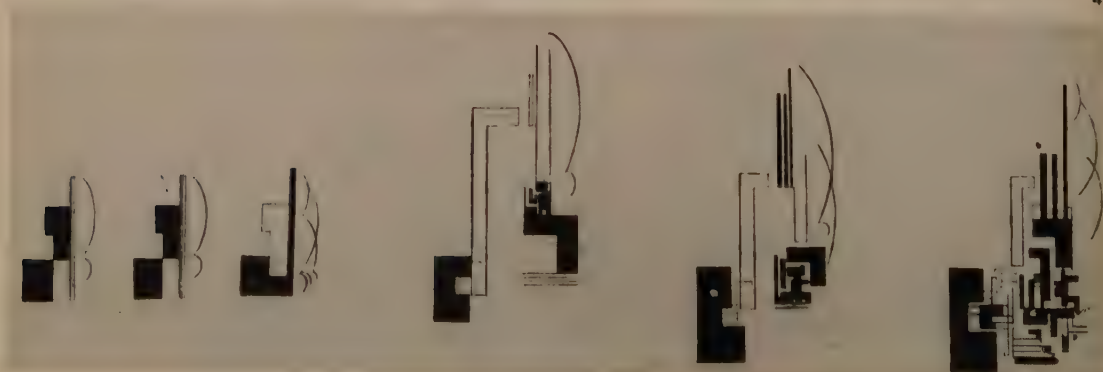


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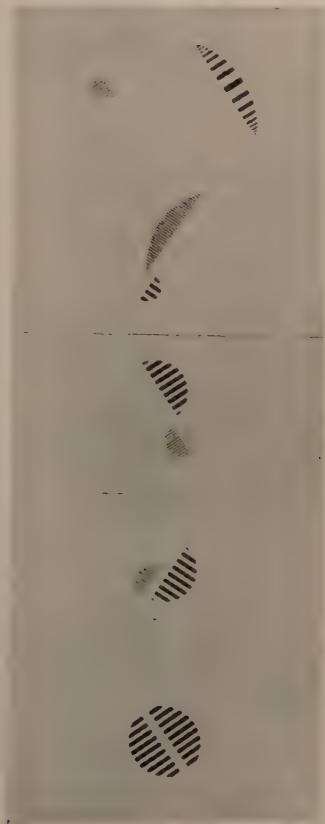
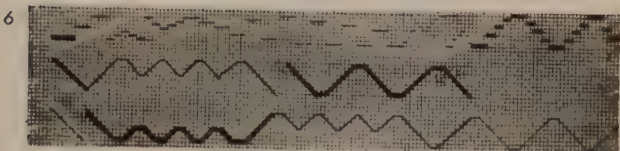
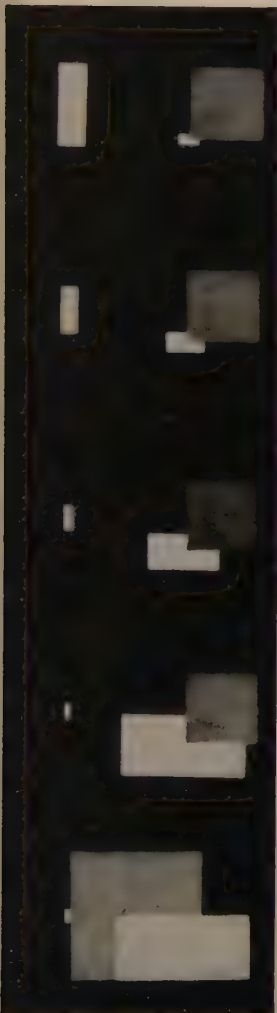
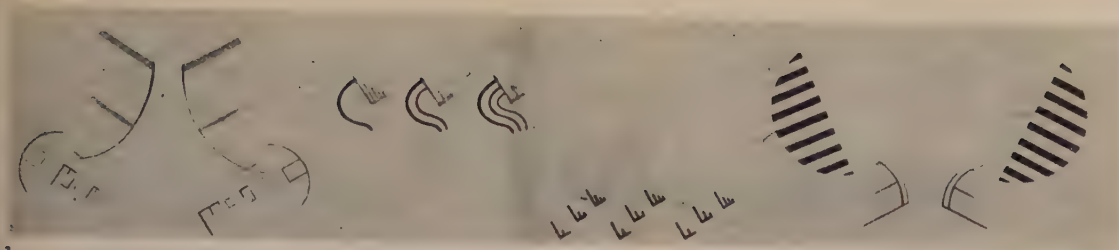
1. Viking Eggeling, *Diagonal Symphony*, Scroll painting, 1919-20. 2. Egyptian Scroll Painting, from Drioton, *Encyclopédie photographique de l'art*, photograph André Vigneau (Editions TEL, 1949). 3. Hans Richter, *Stalingrad*, 1944, scroll, collage and oil, from exhibition "Art of This Century," Basel, Musée des Beaux-Arts.



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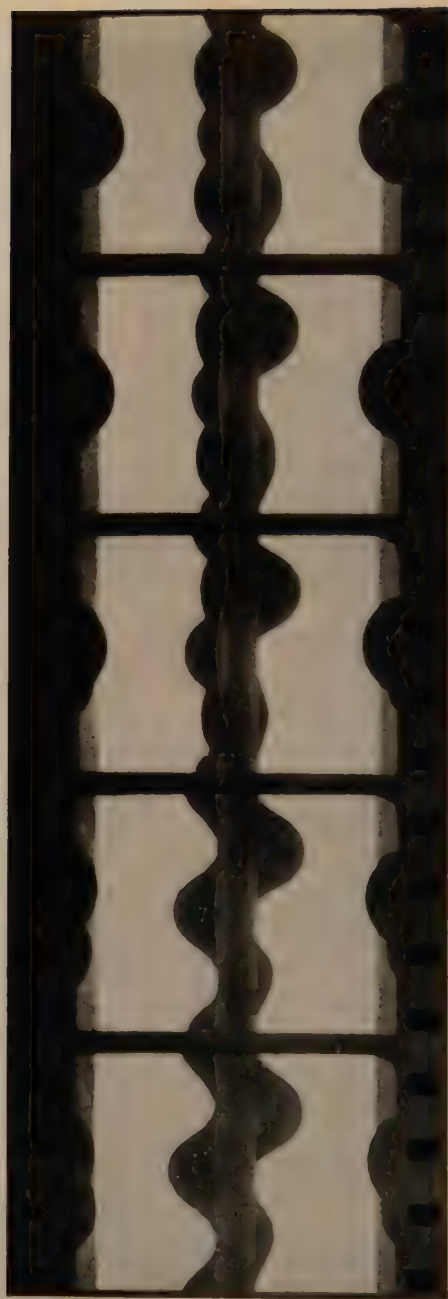


4. Hans Richter, *Prelude*, scroll painting, 1919.
 5. Hans Richter, from *Rhythm 21*, first abstract film, 1921, and 6. Part of score for *Rhythm 21*.
 7. Viking Eggeling, from *Diagonal Symphony*, first abstract film, 1921.





Man Ray, from *Emak Bakia*, 1926



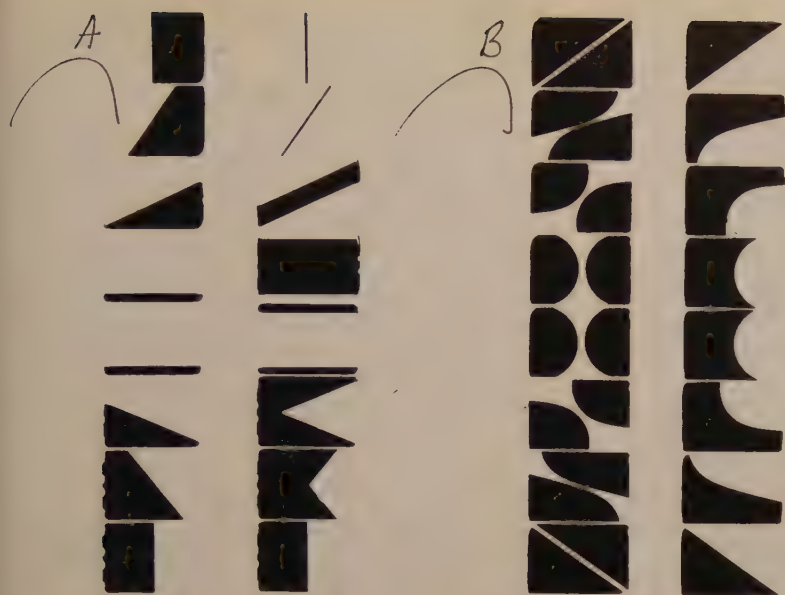
Walter Ruttmann, from *Opus 1*, 1924

words, I did again with the screen what I had done years before with the canvas. In doing so I found a new sensation: *rhythm*—which is, I still think, the chief sensation of any expression of movement.

In 1922, Walter Ruttmann, also an abstract painter, but with an exceptional technical ability and not inhibited by any esthetic research, produced abstract films in a series: *Opus 1*, *Opus 2*, etc. His fish- and birdlike form-rhythms were to be taken up eight years later by his gifted pupil, Oscar Fischinger, to accompany musical compositions. In this happy combination the “abstract” film found a new fulfilment and won a kind of general acceptance. From 1924 on the work of the French group paralleled Ruttmann’s efforts and ours. It was this group which introduced and established the term *avant-garde*.

A whole set of new problems now arose; they were a logical extension, if not a fulfilment, of easel painting but could not be realized in the

static medium. The tradition of modern art developed on a wide front, simultaneously with and embracing the film: the plastic expression of an object in motion under varying light conditions; “to create the rhythm of common objects in space and time, to present them in their plastic beauty” (Léger); the distortion and dissection of a movement, an object or a form, and its reconstruction in cinematic terms (just as the cubists dissected and rebuilt in pictorial terms); the denaturalization of the object in any form to re-create it cinemato-

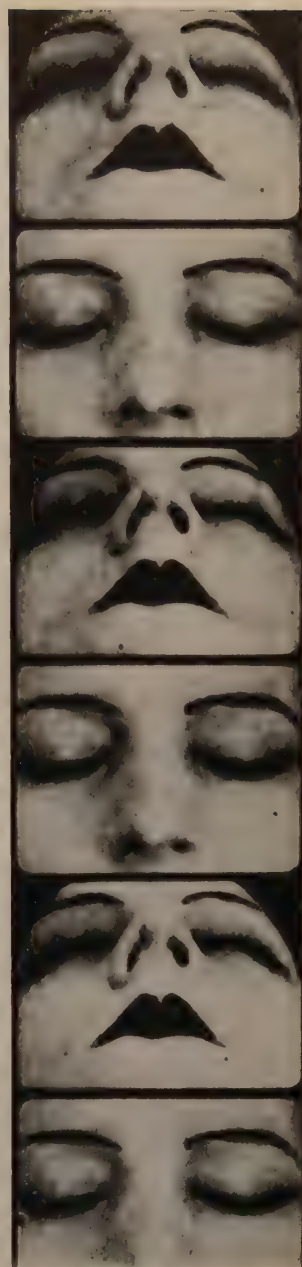


James A. and John Whitney, Worksheet for abstract film, c. 1947.
Through a mechanism devised by the Whitney brothers, the screen can be articulated into all the possible permutations of a single form (e.g. motive A at left, B at right) or combinations of forms.

graphically with light—light with its transparency and airiness as a poetic, dramatic, constructive material; the use of the magic qualities of the film to create the original state of a dream; the complete liberation from the conventional story and its chronology in dadaist and surrealist developments, in which the object is taken out of its conventional context and is put into new relationships, thus creating an entirely new content. “The external object has broken away from its habitual environment. Its component parts have liberated themselves from the object in such a way that they could set up entirely new relationships with other elements” (André Breton).

Painters who had long ago found their style on canvas felt that the film offered the artist new solutions of the problems posed in their work. Fernand Léger, for example, said: “I sensed a new realism in the detail of the common object; I tried to find the plastic value of these fragments of our modern life. I rediscovered them on the screen in the close-ups of objects which impressed and influenced me. However, I felt that one could make the expression much stronger. I decided to ‘frame’ the beauty of this undiscovered world in film. I worked towards this end as I had heretofore done in painting.”

Besides Léger in *Ballet Mécanique* and Picabia in René Clair’s *Entr’acte*, Duchamp, who as early as 1921 had given up painting for chess, nevertheless continued his dynamic problems in film—*Anemic Cinema*, in 1926, and twenty years later in *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. Later, Bruguère, Dalí, Cocteau, Len Ley, the Whitney brothers and other modern painters of the younger generation have followed the unique lure of the



Fernand Léger, from *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924

film and used it without ceasing to be painters as well. There are identical problems for the painter and the filmer, and indeed, why not? Are not both visual arts?

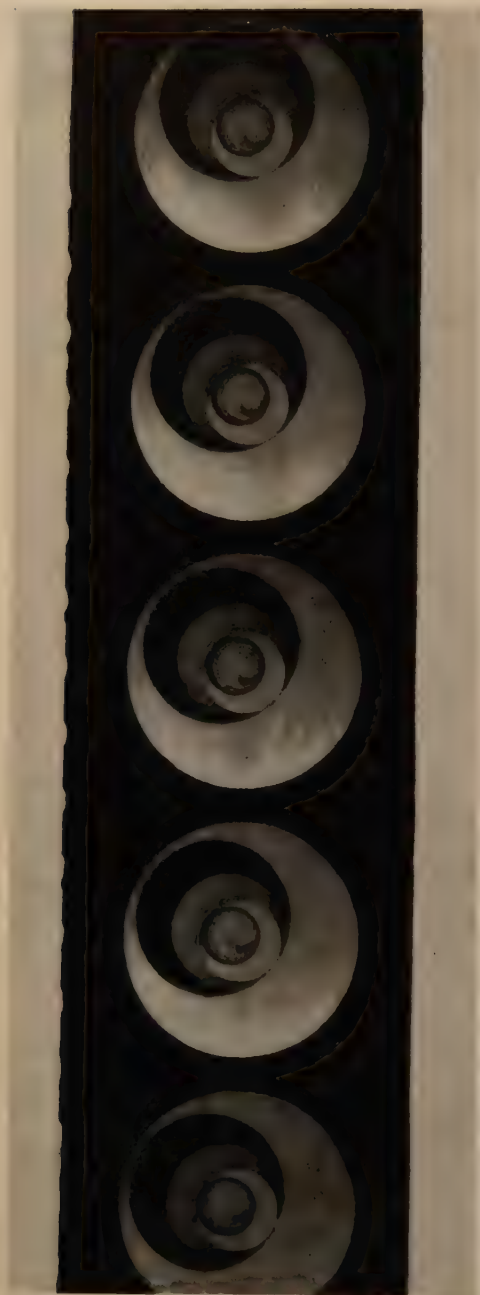
In the meantime, the scope of the experimental film has grown. The principles which we followed with our first abstract film are not limited to the articulation of lines or squares alone. The rhythm of a swing or a clock, the orchestration of hats or legs, the dance of kitchenware or a collar—could become expressions of a new sensa-

tion. The experimental film has at last come into its own. It has created its own realm, which we may term "film poetry" in contradistinction to the "novel" of the entertainment film or the "reportage" of the documentary.

Twenty years ago the documentary was shown and considered exclusively as *avant-garde*; today it is accepted as a legitimate film species. Twenty years from now, film poetry may well be accepted as a legitimate part of film making and recognized as part of the tradition of modern art, whence it came and to which it belongs.

The artists of the coming generation will seriously consider the camera as well as the brush their medium of expression.

Note: All works illustrated are from the collection of Hans Richter or are reproduced from his book *Filmgegner von Heute—Filmfreunde von Morgen*, Berlin, 1929.



Marcel Duchamp, from *Anemic Cinema*, 1926

Marcel Duchamp preparing *roto-reliefs* for *Dreams that Money Can Buy*, 1947, photograph Arnold Eagle



Letters to the Editor

Sir:

Readers of *MAGAZINE OF ART* may be interested in some recent developments in the art and culture of Germany today since these problems were discussed by Dr. Charlotte Weidler ("Art in Western Germany Today," April, 1951) and myself ("German Art Behind the Iron Curtain," March, 1951). The following is a résumé of some facts gathered by direct correspondence.

There is unanimous agreement that in Eastern Germany the Soviet-inspired policies of the government have succeeded in eliminating the last traces of creative independence. A series of articles appearing early in 1951 in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, signed by "N. Orlov" (which according to a well-informed source is a pseudonym for Seminov, Deputy Chief of the Soviet Control Commission for Germany) castigates artists of the Eastern Zone "for not following the directives thoroughly enough" and for still promoting "decadence and disintegration, mysticism and symbolism." In a speech last September inaugurating a new State Art Commission, which does not include in its roster a single name of distinction, Prime Minister Grotewohl declared that "art must mobilize all energies against the mental preparation of American imperialistic war"; and he demanded "an energetic turn in the direction of realism . . . complete penetration of artistic conception with the ideas of the people. . . ."

The art activity of the West German Republic presents a far more intricate picture. There are certainly many favorable developments. The municipalities have followed a policy of positive encouragement and support of modern art. Nearly all the important painters who survived the Nazi oppression are in responsible teaching positions, and some new talents are continuing free experimentation. The Werkbund was re-established sometime after 1945. The Werk-Akademie in Kassel is offering some of Europe's most interesting teaching in applied design and the arts and crafts. The Bundeshaus in Bonn, which stretches along the banks of the Rhine, is a magnificent modern structure by Hans Schuppert.

The small group of friends of modern art who survived the war have of course continued their vigorous support of such efforts. But among the younger people there is a sharp cleavage between those who were exposed to the Nazi régime during its glamorous period, most of whom still regard every deviation from obvious realism as "degenerate," and the young people up to their late twenties who are full of curiosity and enthusiasm for new things. In acceptance or rejection of the modern idiom, political party lines are blurred. Within the Social-Democratic party, for instance, the Socialist burgomasters in

key cities would like to pursue a progressive art policy but are often handicapped by lethargy or timidity of their rank-and-file administrators. There is an atmosphere of fatigue, a desire not to stick one's neck out in an already overly complicated situation.

Intolerant attitudes find various means of expression: letters to the press, to museum directors, to the artists themselves; protests against the hanging of modern paintings in public places; attempts by certain reactionary politicians to ridicule non-objective art. Many observers in Germany insist that these are simply typical of philistine attitudes anywhere in the world. I find it impossible to believe, however, that these opinions have survived independently of association with Nazi ideology and am convinced that with the steady rise of neo-fascist political organizations in Western Germany they could very quickly assume new meaning and importance.

One unfortunate fact which lends greater significance to the various symptoms of intolerant aggression is the return to favor of Nazi painters and sculptors. The very same men who only a few years ago were the violent protagonists of Hitler's doctrines are now de-Nazified and happily installed in prosperous pursuit of their professions. Arno Breker, Hitler's number-one sculptor, Paul Maria Padua, Werner Peiner and Sepp Hitz have all been given renewed support. Josef Thorak, personal favorite of Hitler's, had a one-man exhibition at the Salzburg Festivals in 1950.

Things have gone further than that now. Last fall, Thorak, Hitz and one hundred twenty-five artists of Nazi fame were permitted by the Bavarian Ministry of Culture to exhibit their works in the same Haus der Kunst in Munich where they formerly displayed their triumphant mediocrity for the greater glory of National Socialism. The exhibit was vigorously attacked in many daily papers. From Berlin, the *Deutsche Künstlerbund 1950*, which includes Germany's best artists, sent a protest.

Many people in Germany feel apprehensive about another measure of the Bavarian State: the appointment of Hans Sedlmayr, former Nazi art historian from Vienna, to the rank of full professorship at the University of Munich. One of the most controversial figures in artistic circles in Germany today, heavily criticized and disputed by the modern artists under the leadership of Willi Baumeister, he nevertheless has been given a position of great influence.

Obviously, the over-all picture is none too bright. There is considerable evidence that the balance in favor of free and individual creation and expression is not very substantial, and that it may be diminishing. Nowhere is this felt more keenly than in Western Berlin, in close proximity to the Iron Curtain. Let me quote from a letter of Karl Hofer, dean of German painters:

"One wants to forgive and forget, but the

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others don't forgive and forget. Only they make use of liberty which leaves them publicly the exact liberty to destroy liberty. The Fascist hydra again raises its head—cautiously first, then with impudence, since it is possible to do so with impunity. . . . We are assisting in a tragedy which is without precedent on the stage of world history. We in Germany are gazing as though hypnotized at the bear, while the hyena at our back creeps up unnoticed."

One would certainly like to think that this outlook is overly pessimistic. But is there really any reason to believe that it is?

HELLMUT LEHMANN-HAUPT
New School for Social Research.

Sir:
 The discussion about the role of museums in community life at the Third National Conference of the United States National Commission for UNESCO, held in New York during the week of January 26th through 31st, was supplemented by the New York Museums Committee as a token demonstration of their public activities. Perhaps the following information, paraphrased from a forthcoming article by René d'Harnoncourt, Chairman of the Committee, would be of interest to your readers.

The museums of New York, ranging in subject from art to zoology, combined to stage a related series of exhibitions at prominent points along Fifth Avenue from Thirty-fourth Street to the Plaza, and along the flanking blocks of Fifty-seventh Street. Their aim was to illustrate the cultural interdependence of nations and individuals throughout the world. More than a score of shows, designed by museum personnel and composed entirely of loans from the collections of participating museums, appeared in about one hundred windows. In this way it was hoped that the interest of passers-by would be so attracted that they would explore still further the immense world resources represented in museums which were, in effect, at their own doorstep. The Avenue shows were therefore meant to act as an invitation—a token of available interests; and New York itself could be seen as a sample of a metro-

politan community where museums are at the service of its citizens.

Topics of the exhibitions were as varied as the manifold contents of the museums themselves. They pointed up the ways people work, play, dress, eat, build and think. Their appeal was directed to many sides of human nature: the matter-of-fact, the grave and the humorous. Strollers, shoppers and businessmen saw books, sports, clothes, customs of thought about the world and manners of expressing feelings about it. And though to a great extent it was a spectacle of the lives of others in the past and present, the exposition as a whole was designed to bring home to the onlooker a view of his own nature in a wide context of human activity.

DOUGLAS MACAGY, *Executive Secretary,*
New York Museums Committee

Sir:
 More often than not "popularity" of an artist is a measure of his unimportance. However, there are exceptions, and it is on this score that I defend Béla Bartók against the accusation implied by Mr. Frankenstein in his article, "Art and Music" (December, 1951). First: Bartók is not "popular." For twenty years I and a select audience have waited for his recordings. As they appeared we bought heavily. The same would occur with Villa-Lobos, and I pray that day is not far off. I find, among acquaintances, that people who still like opera, Wagner, Beethoven, Brahms, etc., cannot stomach either Bartók or Villa-Lobos. That seems to me a sound refutation.

Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* reveals him to be the Paul Klee of music; and the fact that Tibor Serly has sweetened it up a bit does not detract from the composer's greatness. . . .

For painters, Klee put all the questions and answered them! Through the *Mikrokosmos*, Bartók tosses out ideas that will stimulate composers for years to come. Each tiny sketch suggests a major work, and it is a pity Bartók had not time to develop them.

L. ZOUTE
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Contributors

The article by **LEWIS MUMFORD** is condensed from one of the six Bampton lectures in America which he delivered at Columbia University last spring and which will be published in book form by the Columbia University Press in April. Mr. Mumford's most recent publication is *The Conduct of Life* (Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

MILDRED FISCHER, formerly chairman of the art department at Knox College, now teaches at the Fort Wayne Art School and Museum, paints, and experiments in woven wall-hangings. She has studied abroad in Vienna and Scandinavia and has won both regional and national awards for her exhibited work since 1945.

FORBES WATSON, editor of *The Arts* from 1923 to 1933, is an old friend of *MAGAZINE OF ART*, to whose pages he has frequently contributed articles and editorials. He is now working on two books: one covering the period during which he served as art critic on newspapers and magazines, the other on artists and art schools.

NAUM GABO was born in Russia in 1890 and educated there and in Munich. Influenced by Malevich, he and his older brother Antoine Pevsner in 1920 issued two manifestoes which proclaimed the esthetic and ideological tenets of constructivism. From 1922-32 he lived in Berlin and for the following three years in Paris, where he was associated with the group *Abstraction-Création*. Following ten years' residence in England, he came to the United States in 1946 and now makes his home in Connecticut.

A. HYATT MAYOR is Curator of Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a member of *MAGAZINE OF ART*'s Editorial Board. His article is part of a forthcoming history of writing entitled *The Three R's*.

Recently honored by a special program of Cinema 16 for his thirty years' work with the *avant-garde* film, **HANS RICHTER** is now head of the Institute of Film Techniques at the College of the City of New York. He is at present working with Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst on a new film, *Minotaur*, a retelling of the Greek myth as modern man's experience. He has always continued painting and since coming to this country has had a number of one-man shows. A retrospective of his work 1912-1952 is planned for exhibition in Paris this year.

Forthcoming

The March issue will include an article on Faulkner and expressionism by **WRIGHT MORRIS**; a portfolio of early Picasso drawings in the Cone Collection, with notes by **ADELYN D. BRESKIN**; "Art, Films, and Art Films" by **GEORGE AMBERG**; "The Origins of Rodin's Gates of Hell" by **ALBERT ELSÉN**; "Prehistoric Stone Sculpture of the Columbia River Basin" by **PAUL WINGERT**.

Film Review

PICTURA—Adventure in Art, produced by Leonid Kipnis and Herman Starr; 35 mm; black and white; sound; 80 min. Running commentary spoken by Vincent Price. Includes: "The Lost Paradise" by Hieronymus Bosch, planned, directed and produced by Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras, music by Roman Vlad, commentary from Genesis spoken by Vincent Price; "The Legend of St. Ursula" by Vittore Carpaccio, directed by Luciano Emmer, co-produced with Sergio Amidei, narration by Richard Nixon spoken by Gregory Peck, music by Roman Vlad; Francisco Goya, produced and directed by Luciano Emmer and Lauro Venturi, narration by Harry Marble, musical score by Isaac Albeniz performed by Andres Segovia; Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, produced by Pierre Braunberger, directed by Robert Hessens and Olga Lipska, commentary adapted by Herman Starr spoken by Lilli Palmer, music by Guy Bernard; Paul Gauguin, produced by Pierre Braunberger, directed by Alain Resnais, research by Gaston Diehl, commentary adapted from Gauguin's letters and journals, spoken by Martin Gable; Grant Wood, produced by Leonid Kipnis, directed by Mark Sorkin, research by Jules Schwerin, photographed by John Lewis, music by Lan Adomian, narration spoken by Henry Fonda. Available from Pictura Films Corporation, 487 Park Avenue, New York 22.

Although a number of inexpensive shorts about art have been made here and abroad in recent years, few have been shown widely in theaters in this country. Limited theatrical distribution of art films in Europe warrants production on a small scale there of low-budget pictures in this class, but exhibitors here are wary of booking subjects outside the field of so-called entertainment. American producers have therefore tended to design their art movies for release to colleges, museums and clubs whence financial returns are slim. And the result, except where sentiment, guile or subsidy may intervene, is apt to show the curse of economy. Inexperience, the use of cheap materials, technical shortcomings, esthetic indiscretion and even faulty scholarship are fairly common marks of these films, though their virtues have been sufficient to sustain the interest of followers who perhaps hope, by a patient vigil of uncritical attention, to encourage the makers.

To the extent that improvement depends on a more secure financial footing, these followers are naturally ready to welcome a move in that direction. The most conspicuous move, at present, is being made by the Pictura Films Corporation. This company has assembled half a dozen short subjects, more or less about works of art, into a picture of feature length. At the economic level, this is unquestionably a bold undertaking. It is

true that the issuing of any one of the individual units would not have been rewarding, since short subjects fetch little on the market these days. But the launching of a feature-length subject that does not fit the trade's notion of entertainment is a risky enterprise. Release to the art-house circuit, to theaters which cater to audiences with a taste for foreign pictures, is perhaps the best prospect; though the returns from this quarter do not compare favorably with those from exhibition in regular theaters. The version of the film about Michelangelo which we know as *The Titan* enjoyed a reasonably successful run in art houses, and its occasional showing in non-theatrical circles still pays investors a dollar or two. *Pictura—Adventure in Art* probably cost more to put together, and its advance promotion has been more ingenious and far more extensive than in the case of *The Titan*. With this background in mind, one would suppose that those who are interested in the welfare of motion pictures about art might be forgiven for applauding the business courage and initiative in propaganda shown by Pictura Films Corporation in relation to its current offering.

Yet the tribute would be shortsighted. It would amount to the claim that an elaborate repetition of past weaknesses in art-film production, spliced to slick Hollywood treatment aimed at the bobby-sox level, could contribute to the welfare of the genre. The present outcome is a confused anthology of short subjects, originally intended for independent exhibition, in which the units have been pruned to conform with a running account that often sacrifices visual values to those of verbal narration. The six units are introduced and linked by cutaways to a bright southern California campus where lolling students listen to a stagy delivery of platitudes about art and artists. No doubt this device was meant, among other things, to join the otherwise discontinuous stories of the lives of the artists or the scenes they portrayed by a line of human interest. As it is handled here, the device fails. The transition, for example, from Vincent Price's quite eloquent reading from the King James version of *Genesis* to a student who immediately refers to Bosch as "that guy" is no less jarring than the quick shift from the pictorial space and illumination of the Bosch triptych to the optical space and Hollywood backlighting in which the students disport. By substituting the sweat shirts of students for what have sometimes proved to be the stuffed shirts of professors, the producers have merely introduced another contrast between Bosch and modern times, and at the human-interest level their contrast is equally irreconcilable. This unconvincing effort at linkage punctuates the film from beginning to end, always accompanied by the insensitive breaks in cinematic form that have already been mentioned.

Works by Bosch, Carpaccio, Goya, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin and Grant Wood appear

in sequence. The subject matter alone is therefore bound to appeal to those interested in the work of these artists. They may feel that some of the artists appear in strange company, but they must remember that ready-made movies about art are relatively scarce, and that the anthologist of poetry, for instance, is in a more favorable position than the art-film editor to express a point of view through selection. Certainly the evidence here suggests that the selection of these particular artists was more or less governed by the availability of existing films about them. It would have been a different matter, of course, had the complete picture been planned from scratch. What remains is to enjoy reproductions of the given works within the limits allowed.

Of these limits, some are intrinsic to the medium, while others are imposed by the inventive capacities, discretion and resources of the maker. It is interesting to observe that one of the most obvious characteristics of the form—motion—has posed a major problem for the producer of movies on painting. Physically, his subject is static and carries its own quality of illumination. Motion must be introduced by the roving camera, by duration of shots, cuts, dissolves or contrived lighting. In a sense, looking at movies is a submissive process. Usually an identification of some kind is made, with the passing scene, say, or with the camera's eye. In the case of a painting, the experience offered by the work of art is a personal affair between it and the observer. The command of a camera to look at a reproduction of this and that detail in such and such an order is apt to be regarded as an intrusion, and even as a violation of esthetic response in terms of the painting. Grudgingly submissive, the spectator attends painfully to the camera, following its motions up and down, in and out, from side to side. Inadequate as this treatment may be, ten minutes or so is tolerable—and that is about all each of the short subjects in this film was originally planned to take. After an endurance test of more than an hour, however, the susceptible are likely to leave the theater with an empathic pain in the neck.

Continuity within each of the units in the picture is determined, on the whole, by a story line. Details of the works by Bosch and Carpaccio are presented in sequences which emphasize the stories they illustrate; the section on Goya stresses the times he expressed; those on Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin refer to the lives of the artists; and the final account of Grant Wood combines his life and times with a capsule analysis of one or two of his paintings. The Bosch, produced and directed in Italy by Luciano Emmer, is well conceived. Details are neatly framed, the pace sensitively handled, and the treatment of light and dark, especially at the point where paradise is lost, is impressive. At times out of balance, Vlad's music is neverthe-

less apt. St. Ursula takes precedence over Carpaccio in the second section, where the ancient legend, made more sentimental by Richard Nixon, is uttered uneasily by Gregory Peck. The piece on Goya is a happy interlude in which a creative job of camerawork has the support of Segovia's fine guitar, along with the spare and tidy narration of Harry Marble. Lilli Palmer, on the other hand, is unable to overcome the faults of an incredibly inept script for an almost equally unsympathetic visual interpretation of some work by Toulouse-Lautrec. This script, describing certain glamorous aspects of the life the artist portrayed, requires her to repeat again and again, the refrain "... but not for you, Lautrec!" This questionable procedure is matched by an unrelied series of close-ups of works which need distance to become intelligible. Perhaps it would be too much to hope, after the popular success of the film on Van Gogh, that one on Gauguin could escape the vagaries-of-the-artist theme. And indeed, this one passed through the same hands. Here, however, the presentation of the story, with a narration derived from Gauguin's own letters and journal, presupposes a little more knowledge of the artist's life. This is not the case with the simple, straightforward chronicle of Grant Wood. The entirely suitable voice of Henry Fonda drones along, never skipping an item that might be unknown to someone, while the hills and trees and houses and faces file through. For what it is worth, it is a nice, clean-cut little film. What it is doing in this context is another question.

In fact, with the notable exception of the sequence on Toulouse-Lautrec, any one of these pictures would be worth booking individually. Taken together, each one suffers. And if they must be taken together with the episodes on the campus, their allure fades even more.

DOUGLAS MACAGY
New York City

Latest Books Received

- ART TREASURES OF THE LOUVRE, translated by René Huyghe, New York, Abrams, 1951. 178 pp., incl. 100 color plates. \$10.
- Barr, Alfred H., Jr., MATISSE: HIS ART AND HIS PUBLIC, New York, Museum of Modern Art (distributed by Simon and Schuster), 1951. 591 pp., incl. 264 pp. of black-and-white + 23 color plates. \$12.50.
- Benton, Thomas Hart, AN ARTIST IN AMERICA, New York, Twayne, revised edition, 1951. xiv + 324 pp., 79 plates. \$3.95.
- Grosser, Maurice, THE PAINTER'S EYE, New York, Rinehart, 1951. xii + 244 pp., 32 illus. \$3.
- GUIA DE LAS COLECCIONES PUBLICAS DE ARTE EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS: VOLUMEN I: FLORIDA A NEW YORK, Washington, Union Panamericana, 1951. 152 pp., illus. \$1.50.
- Lister, Raymond, THE BRITISH MINIATURE, London, Pitman, 1951. xii + 114 pp., 68 plates + frontispiece in color. \$7.50.

Book Reviews

Kenneth Clark, *Piero della Francesca*, New York, Phaidon (distributed by Oxford University Press), 1951. 212 pp. incl. 62 figs., 148 black-and-white + 7 color plates. \$8.50.

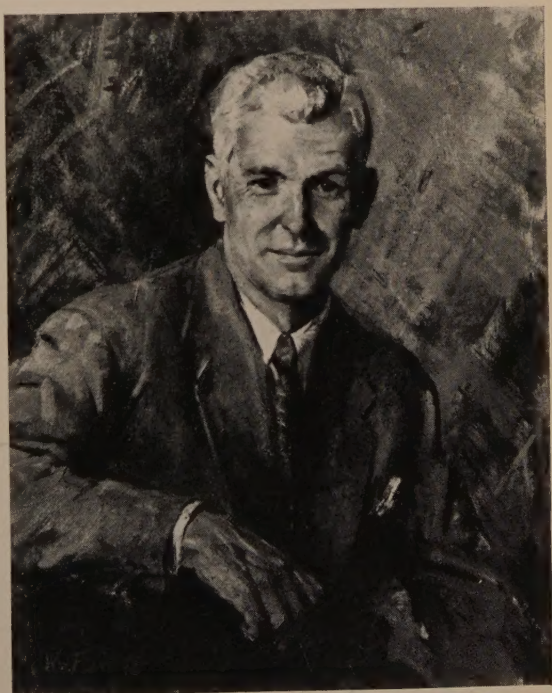
What the volumes of the *Klassiker der Kunst* were to the earlier years of this century the Phaidon books have become today. Both offer to a large audience a more or less complete reproduction of the works of a selected group of old masters, accompanied by an account of their lives and their art. The earlier series, reflecting judgments first formed in the nineteenth century, presented as the "classic" painters of the *quattrocento* Fra Angelico, Mantegna, Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. Nothing is more indicative of the recent redirection of taste than that the first *quattrocento* painter to appear on the Oxford Olympus (after the ineluctable Botticelli) was Paolo Uccello; the second, in the volume just published, Piero della Francesca.

Up to now the rapidly widening circle of Piero's admirers has had the very good monograph published a quarter century ago by Roberto Longhi—colorful, highly suggestive, rather extravagant and difficult, particularly in the inadequate English translation. Sir Kenneth Clark has now undertaken, as he says, not "a full, critical biography of Piero but a guide to the appreciation of his work . . ." His essay is written in the vivid, controlled and beautifully lucid style that we have learned to expect from him—a style that is a particularly expressive medium for the consideration of the serene, measured art of his subject. Referring to the *Madonna of Mercy* in Piero's altarpiece at Borgo San Sepolcro, Clark writes: "Piero had the power of creating forms which immediately satisfy us by their completeness; forms which reconcile the mathematical laws of proportion with the stress and tension of growth, forms which combine the resilience of a tree trunk with the precision of a pre-dynastic jug. Such concentration on pure form places a certain restraint on those inflections which communicate sentiment; and the Virgin has that air of remoteness which early admirers of Piero, brought up on the languorous glances of the Pre-Raphaelites or the unabashed rhetoric of Raphael, found so cold and aloof. For this reason she has been compared to those images embodying the spiritual state of non-attachment to which the Far Eastern religions aspire. But set her beside the smiling Buddha heads of Indo-China or China itself, and how strongly she asserts her Mediterranean humanity!"

From this and numerous similar passages it is evident that while Clark is concerned with Piero primarily as a great *quattrocento* master he presents him with equal clarity and conviction as a major figure in Western painting and in the entire art of the past. He fashions his image of the

painter's style by comparison with Vermeer and Corot for light and color, or the sculptures of Olympia for their "largeness of form and nobility of gesture." Throughout the essay he preserves a breadth of view that was more common seventy-five years ago than in the more specialized criticism of our day. His depth of culture and his fine discrimination save him from falling into the vagueness and inappropriateness that often follow from so long a perspective. Clark writes well, at the same time, of Piero's relations to his contemporaries (though in my opinion he says too much about Fra Angelico and too little about Domenico Veneziano), and of his devotion to mathematics and perspective. Piero emerges therefore neither as a proto-cubist nor a rootless universalist, but as a painter of rare gifts in a small town not very far from the Florence of Masaccio, Brunellesco and Uccello.

Occasionally, it is true, there are minor lapses in critical viewpoint. Though the simile is stirring, it is misleading to give Christ at the moment of resurrection (fresco in Borgo San Sepolcro) the "doomed and distant gaze of a somnambulist." This is all the more inappropriate because at the end of his essay Clark attributes to the painter a profound Christian belief. The reader is, in any event, not adequately prepared for this summation by references to religious meaning in the course of the essay. Clark is on



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the whole very cautious in inferring meanings of any kind, beyond the morality and idealism of the painter's vision of an orderly, geometric world. Only occasionally does he venture an interpretation, such as the symbolism of the nude youth in the *Baptism*; and sometimes, as when he relates the Urbino panel of the *Flagellation* to the trials of the church after the fall of Constantinople, he is too casual to provide a complete and convincing demonstration.

Clark's estimate of the limits of interpretation extends to other critical or historical methods. He occasionally shows what seems to the present reviewer an unwarranted skepticism of the possibilities of judging style, as in his rather tentative account of the growth of Piero's art during the course of the painting of the *Misericordia* polyptych. And while the way in which he holds his eye on the paintings themselves is admirable, particularly in an essay of this kind, his refusal to sacrifice even temporarily their full concreteness imposes certain limits on his criticism. Sometimes he does take what he would probably judge to be a flyer, as when he proposes that Piero, "who enjoyed such intellectual games," introduced a prominent unit of measurement into the *Flagellation*. This claim does not, in this reviewer's opinion, stand the test of measurement.

Since Clark has intended, as he informs us, to write only a guide to the appreciation of Piero, we cannot expect him to have taken a position on all the critical problems in which Piero's work still abounds. (Though he should know that the *Madonna del Parto* in Monterchi is not a novel image of the pregnant Virgin, belonging rather to a tradition established in the Florentine *trecento*.) In the sphere of chronology he has made one important advance beyond Longhi, placing the beginning of the *Baptism* after the beginning of the *Misericordia* polyptych. He is likewise sounder than Longhi when attributing to a follower rather than to the master himself the *St. Luke* in S. Maria Maggiore, Rome. The most pressing problems in Piero's *œuvre* lie, however, in the last paintings. Clark's account of the great-

est of the enigmas, the Perugia altarpiece, leaves us rather uneasy. He assumes that the two main pieces, though they may have been designed independently, were put together in their present form by Piero himself. Even if this view were correct, any reading of the panels as they appear today must allow for a somewhat different original shape of the *Annunciation*. It is clear that the spatial ambiguities of the Virgin that Clark emphasizes are directly bound up with the present shape of the panel. If more of the architecture were visible, these ambiguities would disappear. This point has a special significance because Clark associates the weaknesses that he finds in the *Annunciation* with what seem to him similar weaknesses in the other late paintings, joining them in support of the one major novelty in his interpretation of Piero.

The Perugia polyptych, the Brera altarpiece and the Urbino *Madonna* all seem to Clark the work of a painter who in his last years had either become increasingly indifferent to painting or had lost the sources of his power. Clark is not unaware of some of the difficulties that this thesis presents. He finds the architectural setting of the Brera altarpiece "superb" and the late *Nativity* in London so beautiful that it can be "explained only by an effort of imagination." It is not, however, his estimate of the value of some of the late works that seems unsatisfactory—in some respects he is quite right. What is regrettable is his failure to recognize, or at least to present to the reader, the qualities these works undoubtedly possess. In his enthusiasm for the geometry and the spatial pattern of Piero's earlier designs, Clark shows little sympathy for the imposing frontality of the later forms, the iconic saints with their tiny but intense eyes, the awesome stillness in which only the light moves, and all those visual refinements that relate the painter to Jan van Eyck. This represents a real lack. But for the earlier painting of Piero, Clark is a perceptive, eloquent and altogether unrivaled guide.

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Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1951. 159 pp., 127 plates, 8 in color. \$5 cloth; \$2.75, paper bound.

This volume, like so many of the publications of the Museum of Modern Art, is more than the record of a temporary exhibition—in this case the exhibition of American abstract painting and sculpture held in the Museum last winter and currently on tour throughout the country. Andrew Ritchie has also written a succinct history of the abstract movement, abroad as well as at home. The first part of his text, which contains a review of the philosophical postulates of abstraction as well as of the early empirical experiments, includes the work of the first American abstract artists to about 1925. For the general reader this historical introduction, sensitive, informed and unprejudiced, enlarges the relevant portions of Alfred Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936), so long and so regrettably out of print. A second, shorter section serves to introduce five categories for the examination of contemporary art. Mr. Ritchie admits that these are arbitrary and perhaps too exclusive, but as a means for guiding the spectator into the subject and enabling him to form his own judgments about unfamiliar and frequently difficult works of art, the categories will serve until other groupings appear more useful.

In both sections the arrangement of the illustrations provides an eminently clear and convincing basis for demonstrating the history of the movement and also for showing contemporary divergences from earlier esthetic positions. Those who saw the exhibition will be grateful for the juxtapositions and contrasts, which recall the subtlety and insight with which Mr. Ritchie installed the actual objects last winter. This reader remembers with special pleasure the incorporation of sculpture and constructions with the paintings, avoiding the usual deplorable relegation of three-dimensional objects to a subsidiary position.

Such an exhibition and publication raise certain questions, and quite properly. It has ever

appeared a cardinal principle of the program of the Museum, however much it may be subject to correction in detail, to demand of its staff and to expect of its audiences the active, rather than passive, exercise of the critical function in the analysis and evaluation of contemporary art. Mr. Ritchie's demonstration of the variety and quality of American abstract painting proves that this kind of art is a major element in our cultural expression. But does it do more? Can it be that the authority revealed in the choice and presentation of these works, although admittedly related to Mr. Ritchie's own taste, may indicate that we have passed beyond the earlier experimental phase and even through the mature, "classic," period of a specific style? Can it be that with the general acceptance of abstract art, at least as a valid means of expression, we must prepare ourselves for a different development? A hint of this is perhaps to be found in the distinction, too intangible to call a discrepancy, between Mr. Ritchie's categories—which are essentially based upon formal properties—and the extraordinary range of expression found in the works themselves. It may be noted that even the categories of "Expressionist Geometric" and "Expressionist Biomorphie" emphasize the structure rather than the content of the works. Can it be that in the future, if not already in the present, the expressive function of the work of art will prevail over more deliberate studies of structure, so that we may expect to see emerging a new, as yet un-nameable kind of painting, but one which may recover for the later twentieth century the associative values of symbolic reference?

If these questions are germane to the problem facing the abstract artist today, then Mr. Ritchie's work is to be commended for raising them. He has established standards for the critical evaluation of abstract art of the immediate past, and he has prepared our eyes and minds for the work to be produced in the imminent future. No critic can do more; few have done as much.

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The West of Alfred Jacob Miller, from the Notes and Water Colors in the Walters Art Gallery, edited by Marvin C. Ross, Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1951. xxviii + 200 pp. of plates. \$10.

This is a well-planned and an extremely "readable" picture book, as well as an important contribution to the history of American art. Although the book covers only the partial production of one artist, it will help considerably to place this artist properly in a chapter that might be called "First Painters of the Early West," when a comprehensive scholarly history of American art is produced at some future date. Alfred Jacob Miller appears to be the first artist of consequential production to have actually traveled into the Far West to make a first-hand pictorial record. His name is associated with that of George Catlin and with Charles Bodmer; taken collectively, these three men are perhaps the most famous pictorial documentors of the early western scene. An audience for Miller's work dates back to 1948 when Bernard De Voto's excellent book, *Across the Wide Missouri*, was published. Of the eighty-one plates in that book, sixty-eight (including thirteen of the nineteen color plates) were reproduced from original work by Miller. Not only did De Voto give us this quantity of illustration of Miller's "Sketches," but he also gave a good account (hidden in an appendix) of the major recording artists of the West. The "First Illustrators" as he called them, are the names already mentioned—Miller, Bodmer and Catlin—and thus we have the background reading for Mr. Ross's present volume on Miller.

Miller, the Baltimore-born artist, after study in Europe traveled to New Orleans, where he met William Drummond Stewart, who hired him to accompany his "sporting" expedition into the Far West. Stewart, who was soon to inherit land and title in Scotland, had the means and the imagination to seek out a good draftsman to go along as a member of his retinue. The party of about ten people left Independence, Missouri, in late March or early April, 1837, and together with agents of the American Fur Company trav-

eled as far as "the thirteenth 'rendezvous' of the fur traders at Green River," now in the State of Oregon. By or before November of the same year the party had returned to St. Louis. As to the date of the Stewart-Miller expedition, De Voto states that it occurred in 1838; Mr. Ross seems to have ample proof that it was in 1837.

Although Stewart remained in the mid-West and made another but shorter expedition into the wilderness, Miller was presumably at work in the East making oil paintings from his sketches and notes. By October, 1839, he had completed eighteen oils which were exhibited at the Apollo Gallery in New York. A year later Miller arrived at Murthly Castle in Scotland to complete a series of large oils of the West commissioned by the then Sir William Drummond Stewart. There is a record that Miller, while at Murthly, made a replica portfolio of his drawings and notes of the western trip. The fact is noted by J. Watson Webb, who reported that he had taken Henry Inman to Murthly to see the portfolio. Alas, that was in 1844, and no later record of the existence of this particular portfolio exists. The collection of Miller's work now owned by the Walters Art Gallery of Baltimore and reproduced in this book was made in replica twenty years after the famous western heira.

This book was planned and prepared by Marvin C. Ross of the Walters Art Gallery. Although Mr. Ross is best known for his scholarship in earlier fields of art history, he has done good service in the production of this book. The drawings, better described as watercolors, are faced on the opposite page with the artist's own notes, without any additional editorial comment. Thus the bulk of the book is completely the work of the artist Alfred Jacob Miller. Preceding the plate and note section there is an informative essay by Mr. Ross on Miller the artist. The study of Indian iconography, so long neglected, is now finding a wide and appreciative audience. The next book to be written to fill a growing demand is a complete, scholarly life of Catlin.

MARY BARTLETT COWDREY
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